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U DOXO

**8 PLAYABLE
PS2 GAMES INSIDE!**

Final Fantasy X-2 **PLUS!** Prequel Video!
Need For Speed Underground • XIII
Castlevania • I-Ninja and more!



OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE



**Final
FANTASY X-2**

demo • review • eternal calm

DECEMBER 2003 ISSUE 75
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12 > 8



Comic Mischief
Mild Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

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JAK II



THIS WORLD IS
BETTER LEFT TO JAK.

It ain't no namby pamby fairyland, pal. It's a whole new kind of evil. Crawling with ruthless dictators, backstabbing allies and blood thirsty freaks with an appetite for extra rare meat. All pansies kindly tippy toe on out of here. This requires someone with serious ass-kicking savvy. And that someone, my friend, is Jak. This time he's pissed off and battle ready, with a frighteningly large gun, get-the-hell-outta-my-way hoverboard and a nasty case of mutant powers. So please, save yourself the detached appendages and let him handle it.

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PlayStation 2



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Intense Violence
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Strong Language

"FROM ROOFTOPS TO ESCALATORS; NOTHING IS OFF LIMITS." - FHM

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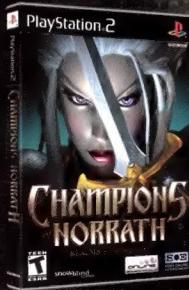
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—OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

"With a feature set this deep, this may indeed be the new champion of action RPGs." — PSM

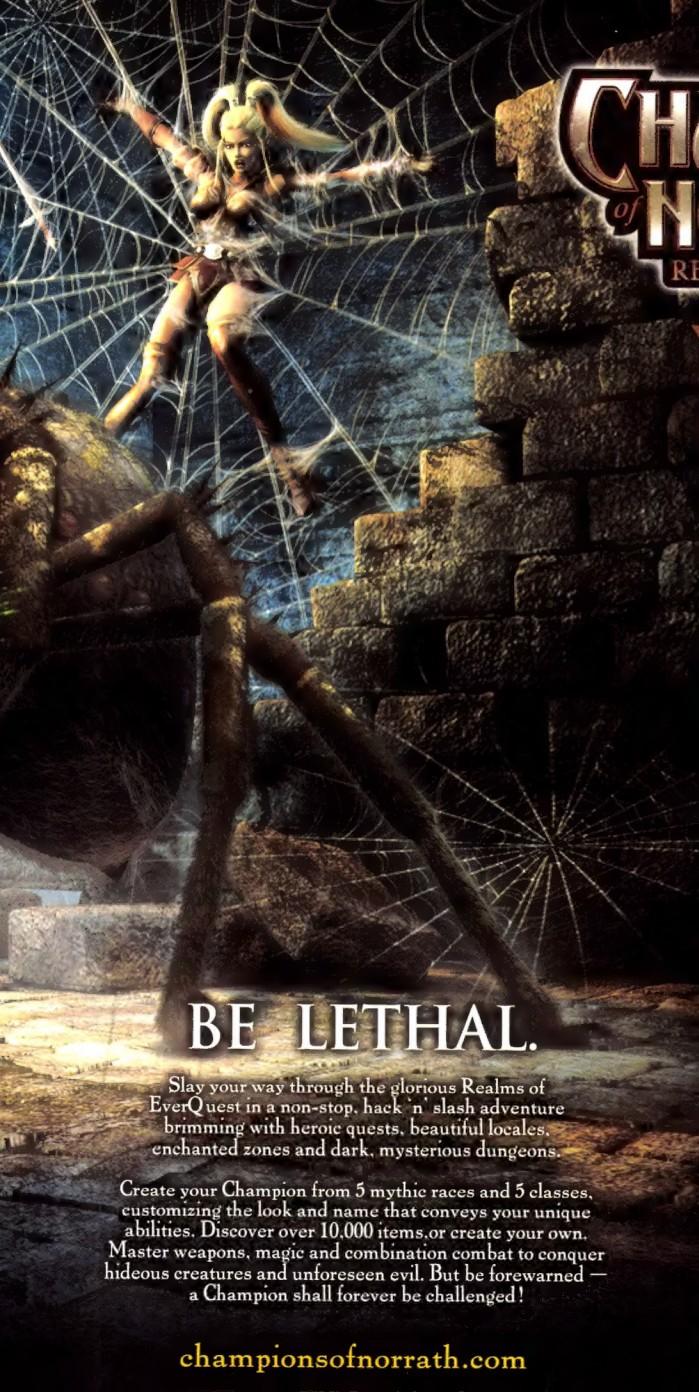


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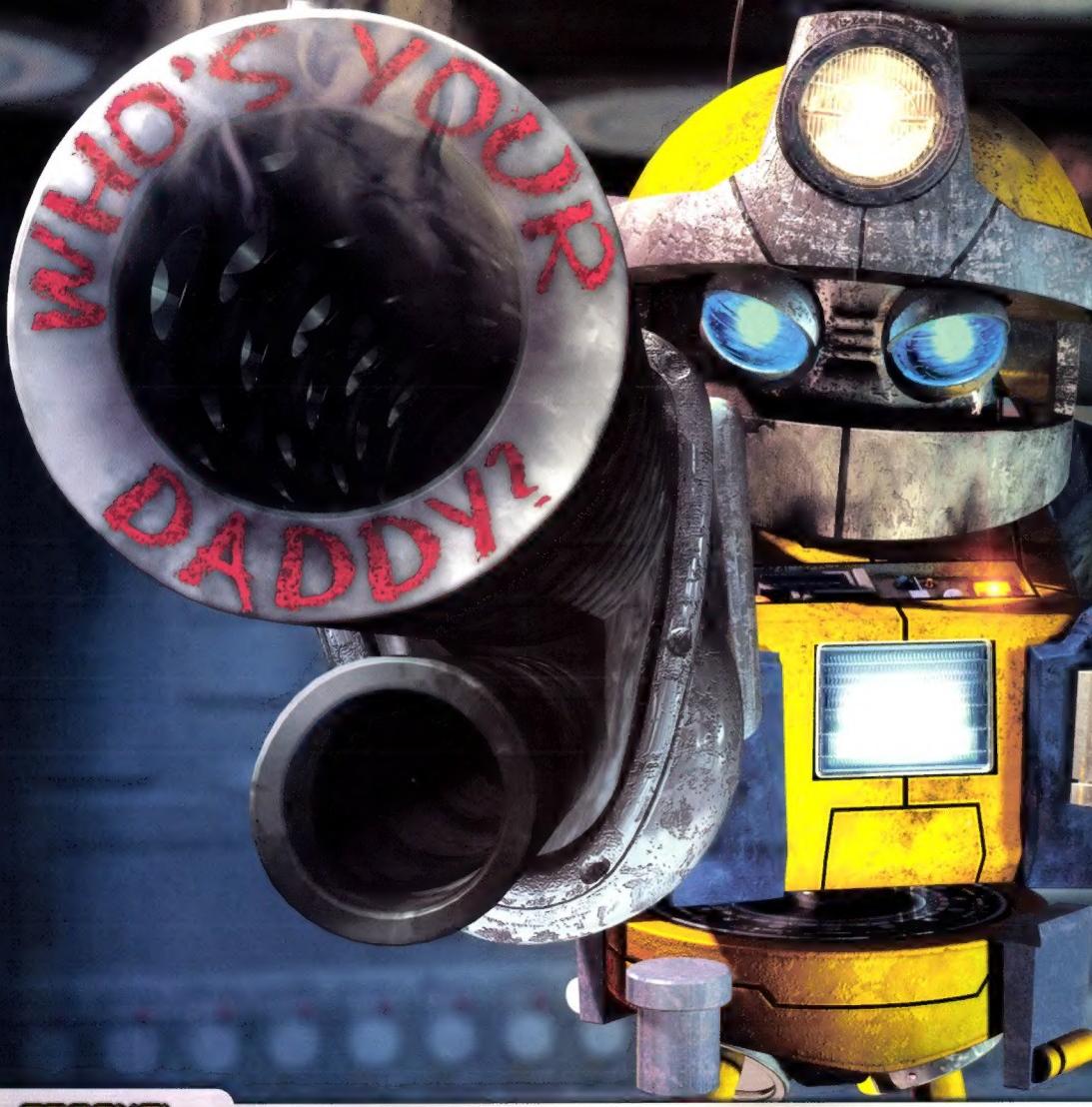
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PlayStation 2



Violence



*INTERNET CONNECTIVITY required. Online game play available for the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system only. PlayStation®2 online play requires internet connection and Network Adapter for PlayStation®2 (not included separately).

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FINAL FANTASY SPOOGEATHON

We go absolutely Squenix crazy

If you're not a *Final Fantasy* fan already, I think we'll have you converted by the time you're done with this issue. Not only do we have the first review of the game (you'll only find that here in the *Official PlayStation Magazine* this month), we also have an exclusive playable demo of the game on our DVD (you won't find that anywhere else either), and the exclusive *Eternal Calm* movie which gives an insight into the events that take place between *Final Fantasy X* and its sequel. We're particularly proud of having this movie on our disc, as it was previously only available in Japan and you FF geeks won't be able to see it in English anywhere else in the world. You can't buy it, you can't download it from the Web, and it's not bundled with the new game as a bonus feature either. Sit back and enjoy it, and let it be a taster for future "visual content" that we'll see from Square in the coming months.

If all this isn't enough to get you pumped up on Square goodies, we also have news on *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, too.

Don't care about Square games? Well, we have tons of other good stuff too.



John Davison
Editor-in-Chief

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GENRE SPOTLIGHT
You know that Song song "Rock You Like a Hurricane"? Well, we've got rocked this month: when Juan smashed it Nova Scotia. But they didn't stop him from reviewing Space Channel 5 and Star Trek for us! That dedication, or what?



DAVE SMITH

Dave is hardcore. He knows more about anime than anyone we know. Plus, he's one of the intrepid new Internet Adventurers working for Sam. We wrote our *Gundam* review and does our anime column. www.1up.com



JASON SCALZI

John's new book, *Book of the Damned*, just hit shelves right now. Which means... who would go buy it? Yes, you. What are you still doing here? Do you think we're kidding when we say it's the best book ever?

Videogames Have Ratings, Just Like Movies

The Entertainment Software Rating Board provides information about videogame ratings. ESRB ratings are intended as guidelines only; parents should still monitor minors' purchases.

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RATING
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Adults Only
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PlayStation.2



Limited DVD In Every Guide



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**ON THIS MONTH'S EXCLUSIVE
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REVIEWS



DISC PROBLEMS?

Did you buy a copy of our magazine that did not contain a demo CD? Simply send the receipt in an envelope marked "OPM Replacement Disc" to the address below with the name and address of the store plus your phone number and address and we'll send you the disc. Make sure you specify which month the corresponding disc belongs to in order to ensure you get the

Also, if you have a malfunctioning or non-working demo disc, call EBS at 1-800-627-6458. They will provide instructions to obtain repair or replacement services.

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MISSION DIRECTIVE

Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

August 6, 1942 - Japanese forces have occupied much of China, Indochina, and everything in the Pacific between Australia and Hawaii. It's time to take it back, and the dense jungle island of Guadalcanal is first in line. Infiltrate the island, silence the sentries and pave the way for America's first offensive action in WW II.



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Philippines, 1942

The next stop on your tour takes you deep into the lush jungles on the Philippine island of Luzon. Your job: Hold the last bridge against the advancing Japanese. And if you can't hold it, make sure no one else can. Partner with a demolition unit, set the charges, and get out alive. The only one to pay a toll on this bridge will be the Japanese.



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When bullets don't work, bring in the high explosive.



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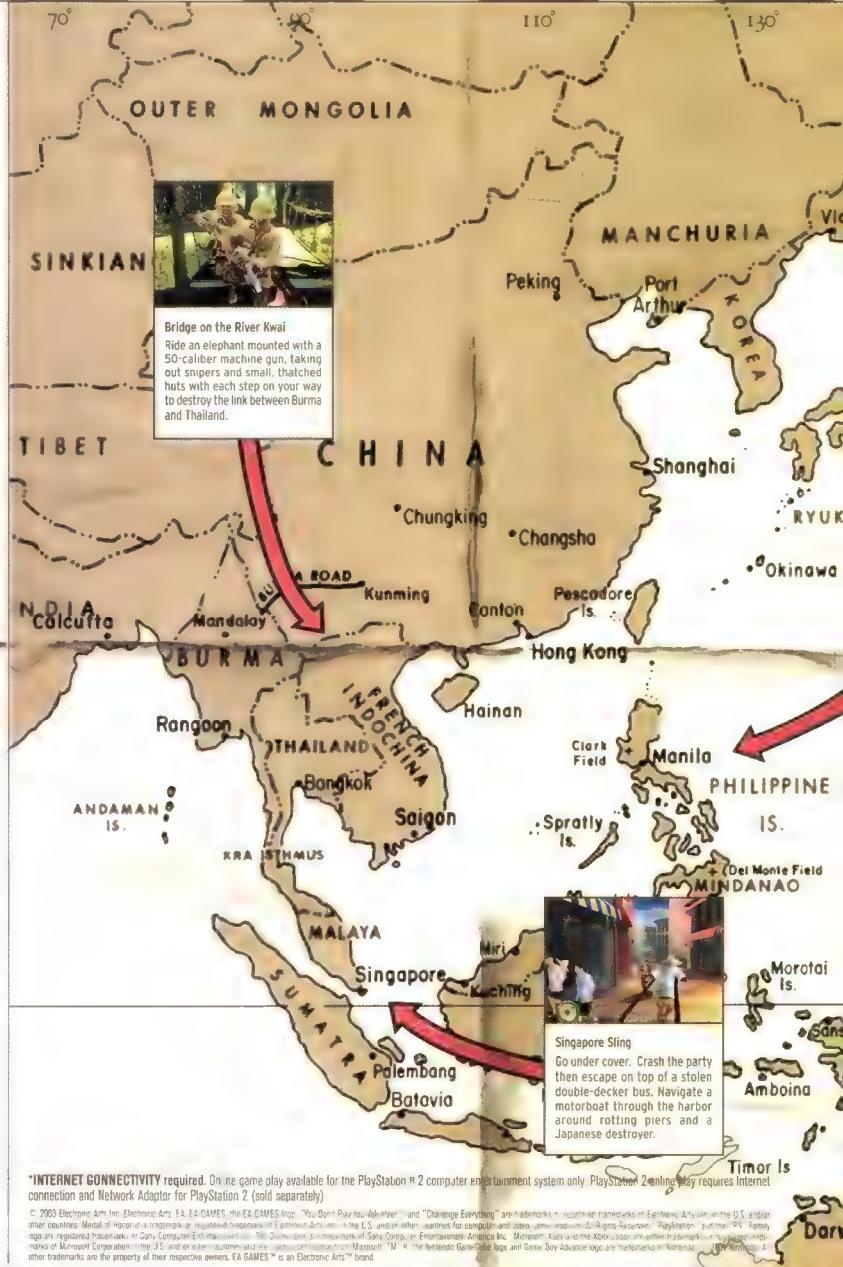


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Marcus



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Midway



Fall of Philippines

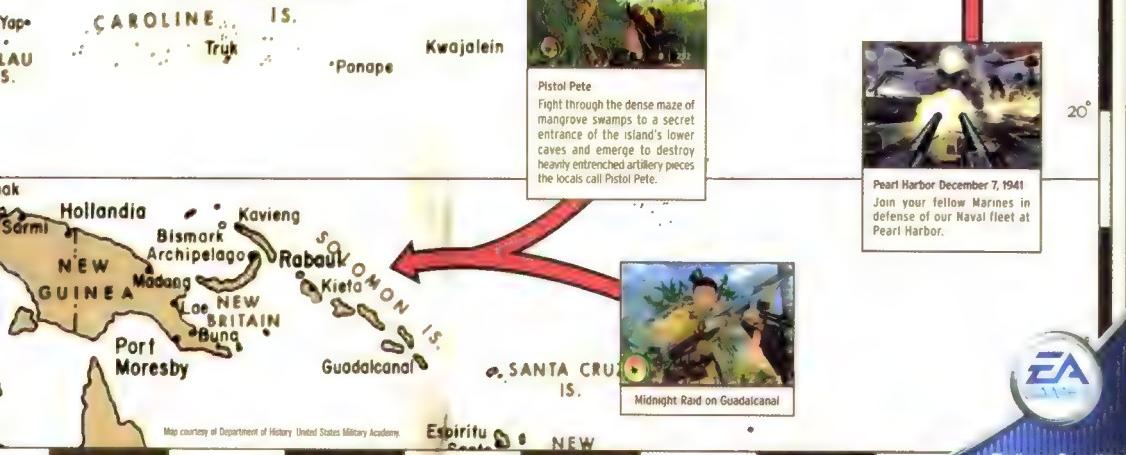
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23% Good, but
overly violent25% It's gonna
be great!but I'll still play it
30% It disgusts me
3% What's *Manhunt*?

Reaction to Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is overwhelmingly positive. "At first I disregarded it as a game I should like because I'm 'supposed to,'" says George Velesko. "Playing it firsthand reminds me why, sometimes, hype is justified." Still, there is the occasional detractor: "I'm still not very excited," voices Phil Carsner.

Behind the Scenes at Rockstar

How dumb can this get? Rockstar is being ridiculous by creating *Manhunt*, a game based on snuff films. Was this the dialogue the developers had as they came up with the idea for the game?

Rockstar Guy 1: Dammit! Nobody seems to be complaining about *Grand Theft Auto* anymore!

Rockstar Guy 2: I know! I thought we were gonna be the Eminem of videogames. I mean, what the hell went wrong? We let them blow people's heads off in *GTA: Vice City*? That seems like enough violence to upset almost anybody. All we want is a little controversy, people! We've failed!

RG1: Wait, wait, I have an idea.

RG2: A sick, twisted, and disgusting idea? One that will make even the most hardcore guys out there a little queasy?

RG1: Yes! A game based on wait for it... snuff films!

RG2: BRILLIANT!

RG1: LET THE GOREFEST BEGIN

Come on, Rockstar. You can do better than this. This is stupid, immature, and comparable to *BMX XXX*.

UltimateBluejew
via e-mail

It might be a little dismissive to say that Rockstar isn't still getting heat for *GTA*, but we see your point. Is Rockstar now just creating violence for the sake of violence? Everyone, let us know what you think by sending us an e-mail labeled **ROCKSTAR VIOLENCE**. If you're not familiar with *Manhunt*, check out page 104.

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David Bowie on Your PS2?

Do you think any game company would ever make the movie *Labyrinth* into a game? If a company like Square did it, and did it right, I think it could be a really good game. It could be an RPG where you play as Sarah, Hoggle, Ludo, and Sir Didymus, and they could get David Bowie to do the voice acting for Jareth. I really like Bowie's acting and wonder if you like the movie, too.

Kamika
Draper, Utah

Labyrinth rocks. And seeing as how the whole basis of the movie revolves around solving puzzles, it could make for a great game. It's doubtful we'll ever see such a



thing, unfortunately, but you never know. If Buena Vista can bring back *Tron* (to PCs, anyway) and Capcom is working on a *Nightmare Before Christmas* game, there's always hope.

Disgaea-sting!

A full page ad for *Disgaea* (in issue 73, page 125) showed a laxative bottle. What does a laxative have to do with playing a game? The ad is, in extremely bad taste and disgusting. I do not want to have my boys, who already think farting is funny, thinking laxatives are funny, and amusing as well. Society already has the younger generation thinking that the grosser it is, the better it is. Who comes up with

Because even the strongest heroes need help sometimes

Because even the strongest heroes need help sometimes

Want to help? Send us a copy of *Disgaea* and we'll enter you in our contest to win a copy of *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness*! Details inside.

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R

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Screen 10-17 Violence and Action, Language and Mild Fantasy

www.Terminator3.com

America Online Keyword: Terminator 3

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— GameSpot, May 2003

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— Game Informer, August 2003

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Violence



PlayStation.2



XBOX

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A large, stylized photograph of Vanessa Carlton, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She has dark hair with bangs and is wearing a dark, patterned top. Her hands are visible in the foreground, one holding a small object. The background is a blurred, high-contrast scene of what appears to be a snowy or icy environment.

Vanessa Carlton

- ◆ Three-time Grammy-nominated A&M Recording Artist performs "Dark Carnival."
- ◆ Exclusively written and recorded for *SpyHunter® 2*, the videogame.
- ◆ "Dark Carnival," vocal and instrumental version included in *SpyHunter® 2*.
- ◆ Game DVD Content also includes "Dark Carnival" performed live by Vanessa Carlton and an interview with Vanessa Carlton.
- ◆ *SpyHunter® 2* - Available November 21 for the PlayStation® 2 computer entertainment system and Xbox® video game system.

SpyHunter® 2
Sneak Preview:
www.spyhunter2.midway.com

For more information on Vanessa Carlton,
check out www.vanessacarlton.com

SPYHUNTER
2

 MIDWAY

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SPY HUNTER 2

THE HUNT BEGINS AGAIN

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The hunt begins at spyhunter2.midway.com



FINAL FANTASY VII: ADVENT CHILDREN

Cloud and Sephiroth return in a Final Fantasy...movie?

As we reported last month, Square Enix is scheduled to show *Final Fantasy VII-2* at a Tokyo Game Show press conference. While we're pleased to say that a follow-up, titled *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, was shown, we were shocked to learn that the project isn't actually a game. At least in the traditional sense, it doesn't seem to be.

Tetsuya Nomura, the character designer for *Final Fantasy VII*, strolled onto the stage with other members of Square Enix's product development division, along with the president of the company, Yochi Wada. Then a movie played, showing Cloud racing on his motorcycle toward a dual-bladed enemy who bears a passing resemblance to Cloud's nemesis, Sephiroth. After a brief fight, the movie transitioned to a scene with Cloud at the beach, where he is overlooking what appears to be the old Shinra headquarters from the first area in *Final Fantasy VII*. But perhaps the best scene from the two-minute clip features an unknown character kneeling in front of a cloaked man sitting in a chair. Just as he reaches out to touch the man's hand, the film cuts to a stylized version of Sephiroth's infamous attack on Nibelheim.

Beyond what was shown at TGS, Square Enix has revealed few details, except that *Advent Children* will take place two years after the events that transpired in the game and the film will be approximately 60 minutes long.

At TGS, Senior Vice President Yoshinori Kitase explained the motivation for the project. Nomura was initially approached

about creating an offshoot of *FFVII*, just to please all the fans eager to know what happens next. The new product, though, won't come in the form of a game. Square Enix is calling it "visual content." Nomura decided this project would be interesting, so Square Enix assembled a staff consisting of members of the original *FFVII* team, as well as team members from other games in the series. "We wanted to make sure that we were successful," said Kitase. "So we gathered staff from *Final Fantasy* that were scattered across the company—we're confident it will be a success."

As for the reason a game sequel wasn't made, Kitase said it would have been too easy. Instead, Square wanted to try something new, something that would test its skills.

Interestingly, Senior Vice President Shinji Hashimoto repeatedly stressed that a specific release date is currently unknown for *Advent Children*. The company is also continuing to hold discussions on how to distribute the project, leading to speculation that DVD isn't the only format being considered [PSP perhaps?]. The other possibility: *Advent Children* might be the world's most expensive teaser for a PS2 sequel.

Cloud to take on Carrot Top?

Perhaps the wiliest thing to come out of the *Advent Children* press conference was a statement made by Square Enix President Yochi Wada, who mentioned the possibility of product tie-ins for the movie, like cell phones manufactured by NTT DoCoMo—one of Japan's largest telecommunications companies.





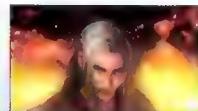
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Your mega buyer's guide
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62
KARAOKE
Bad rock stars rock out
Who's the best singer?



70
BUSTIN' OUT
The Sims, only better
More of a game, less of a sim





THE FUTURE IS NOW

With sales going strong, Sony's focus remains on PS2

At its 2003 Gamers' Day press event, Sony made one thing clear: PS1 and PS2 continue to dominate the videogame industry. "Since 1995, the PlayStation business has been the reason videogames have become the third pillar [of entertainment]," says Kaz Hirai, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America. To date, PS1 has sold more than 35 million units in North America, while PS2 has sold more than 20 million units—and it's on pace to surpass the total number of PS1s sold.

Steady sales numbers for the two PlayStation platforms is a significant reason for Sony's decision to keep any official info about PS3 under wraps. Success has also motivated Sony to look within to uncover and change its weakest areas, such as its lackluster sports development team, 989 Studios. "We're bringing in new leadership," says Jack Tretton, executive vice president of SCEA. "We want to be where we were in the past."

Online play is also a major part of Sony's PS2 strategy. "We have to lead the customer base online because the consumer needs some hand-holding," notes Andrew House, executive vice president of SCEA. "[Now] we have to shift our focus from the core market to the mass market. Sony has already leapt in that direction with its Network Adapter bundle, and it plans to attract even more consumers to online gaming with the release of the PS2 hard drive in North America.

The \$99 40GB drive—due out in March 2004—will include a pre-installed copy of Square Enix's massively multiplayer online RPG *Final Fantasy XI*, along with a variety of demos, *SOCOM II* and *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain* will be among the first to take advantage of the HDD's down-loadable-content support. And if you want to use your PS2 as a media player, the HDD will let you play MP3s and view and edit photos.

Sony's PSX, a version of the PS2 hardware with DVD+ and CD

burning capabilities, is also factored into Sony's focus on the current generation of hardware. Sony wants to keep North American interest in PSX at a minimum in hopes of avoiding *Uncharted*-esque confusion. The PSX—a departure from interactive entertainment says Hirai—Sony sees it as more of a home-entertainment platform. PSX is set to release this year in Japan with two mode's hitting store shelves: a 160GB HD version that will retail for approximately \$700, and a 250GB version that will cost around \$900. A 2004 release is scheduled for North American and European markets.

PSP AT NEXT E3

Sony isn't keen on releasing details about new, concise hardware that could cut into PS2's life span, but development on the PSP handheld gaming device is continuing at a surprising, if not pace. Software libraries and memory modules for PSP are in development, and an emulator designed to run on

PC hardware will be available for developers this fall. Actual hardware kits won't be around until sometime later in the fall, but Sony will show a PSP prototype at E3 in May 2004.

Tretton says there will be about 10 games available launch day, some based on family franchises. Each internal SCEA development team is already working on at least three. Third-party support has been building since PSP was announced, but Sony wants to be sure it's careful about which games are approved. "We'll have to decide, when games work well with that emu comment and which don't," says House.

PSP's battery life remains a hot topic. Sony continues to claim it will be comparable to its similar devices. When pressed further though, the company would only say PSP won't have the 10-hour battery life of Game Boy Advance rather than be closer to that of a portable DVD player.

PSP is on track for a worldwide release date next year.

DATA STREAM

Complete Chaos



SNK Playmore's hardcore NeoGeo 2D fighter, *SNK Vs. Capcom: SVC Chaos*, is coming to PS2 in Japan. An official release date hasn't been set, but expect some Hadoken hijinks by 2004.

Up and Atom



A new game based on the classic Japanese manga (and anime) *Astro Boy* is in development. Hitmaker will handle the task of bringing the internationally beloved character to life on the PS2.

Double the Stealth



From Software revealed at E3 that it's working on *Tenchi Kurenai*—a new game in the *Tenchi* series that features Ayame and an unknown female stealth assassin.

Death to PS2



P.O.D.'s new album, *Payable on Death*, will feature a special version of *Amplitude* that includes an exclusive P.O.D. song that fans can remix. Rock on!



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Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
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* INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED FOR PLAYSTATION 2 AND PCGS. PlayStation 2 online play requires internet connection and Network Adapter for PlayStation 2 sold separately.

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DATEBOOK

NOVEMBER 2K3

www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/giblets.htm
 Did you know that the giblets packed in your turkey aren't from the original bird? Or that there are no grading standards for giblets? Yeah.

SUNDAY



Season 15 of *The Simpsons* begins tonight. Some people say it hasn't been as funny lately. We'd like to kindly tell those nice folks to shut up. It's still the best thing on television—by a long shot.

It may sound like the name for the new James Bond flick, but today is actually **Chaos Never Dies Day**... whatever that means.

16 *Ice, Have a Party With Your Bear Day*. Sounds like a good opportunity to run this pic again.

23/24 *National Cashew Day*. Celebrate by picking all the cashews out of a mixed-nut can and setting them free.

TUESDAY

OK, look, some of these release dates might change. It's inevitable. So don't yell at us. **DON'T YELL AT US!!** It's not our fault.

17 Who knew that *Finding Nemo* would be the summer's top blockbuster? Pixar's digital-direct transfer to DVD should make watching it at home almost as good as being at the theater.

18 *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* is on DVD today. Hopefully, the director's commentary will explain how the Terminator gets really old through the trilogy.

19 *Britney Spears' new album in the Zone* comes out this week, so expect lots of bizarre cross promotions like what you see to the right. [Hey, we're not really complaining.]

25 *Masters of the Universe, Dawn of theander, Cy Girls, Carmen Sandiego: To Track a Thief, and AirForce Delta Strike* wrap it up for PS2 releases this month.

20 Did you know that over 45 million turkeys are consumed on Thanksgiving. That's a lot of giblets.



21 **Happy Guy Fawkes Day.** Here you didn't spend all your money yesterday, since *Matrix Revolutions* opens today. Also, we've been looking forward to *Will Ferrell* in *Eat*, which opens today.



22 *Jason Bateman's birthday list:*

- Hero
- Han
- Hara

23 *Hoppity Party, Need for Speed Underground, EverQuest: Frontiers, SpyHunter 2, NCAA March Mad., Space Channel 5-2, Battletax Gal., Legacy of Kain: Det., I-Ninja, Metal Arms, SWON, Manhunt, Ghost Recon, and Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* are out today.

24 *With all the games that came out yesterday, we neglected to mention that *The Two Towers* Special Precious Extended DVD was released yesterday. Buy it. Now.*

26 Thank you to a stellar performance by Johnny Depp, *Pirates of the Caribbean* turned out to be a fun flick after all. We highly doubt that Eddie Murphy will be able to rise to the challenge in *The Haunted Mansion*, opening today.

THURSDAY



27 **1** **DYK?** The Celts used to celebrate today as New Year's Day and the coming of winter. In 853, Pope Gregory IV proclaimed it **All Saint's Day**. In Mexico, they also celebrate **Dia de los Muertos**, or Day of the Dead.

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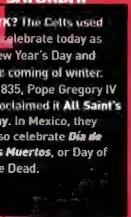
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FRIDAY



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Achtung!

Hauptmann - Ihr Flugzeug brennt*



(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)

The fortunes of German pilots everywhere are about to take a severe downturn. In this intense WWII flight-action game, from Secret Weapons of Luftwaffe®, TIE-Fighter®, and X-Wing® creator Lawrence Hollard, you'll pilot a secret, elite fighter squadron. Your mission: thwart the most insidious plans of the Third Reich. Over Europe and other theaters, you'll pilot nearly two dozen authentic aircraft, and face over 30 air-to-air and air-to-ground combat scenarios. And you won't need any flight training. Just nerves of steel, a steady hand, and a burning desire to rid the world of tyranny, one mission at a time.

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It's still coming
Capcom's co.-shaded action game *Crimson Tears* is still in development and on track for a 2004 release. Producer Tatsuya Minami says work has progressed significantly since the E3 demo.

THE INSIDER

BABY STEPS

Every once in a while, you have a good week—the kind in which 20 things fall into place at once, and a glimmer of a great experience rears its shiny head and roars.

This was one of those weeks. Thank God.

You see, after spending over a year on a game, you fall into a rut of sorts. Not a bad rut, the kind that has you doing the same thing over and over again, but a rut of unending lists of new things that must be done and old things that must be fixed.

Think of game development as a giant jigsaw puzzle. But instead of a puzzle consisting of 300 pieces that, when formed, portray a dog dressed up like a fireman, you have a puzzle of thousands of art assets and tens of thousands of lines of programming code. And unless you're making a sequel, it's a puzzle with no clear instructions or pictures to replicate—it's all about trying to create the best pieces you can and then forming something cool with them.

The problem with trying to put all these pieces together is that you sometimes have to push seemingly important aspects of the game—like making stuff work properly and look good—off for a while. This freaked me out at first; I'm anal as hell, so putting something obviously unpolluted into the game was almost repulsive to me.

What I'm quickly learning, though, is it's all about baby steps. Before you can get a camera that works beautifully, you have one that's barely functional. Before fighting feels good, you have to go through hundreds of A.I. and animation trials, most of which are terrible. Before the collision code is solid, you'll be dropping through walls like mad. During this time, the fear that you'll end up releasing a substandard product starts bounding around in your head so violently that you almost start to believe it.

People who've made more than one game know this is a normal step in the development process, but for those of us who've never been through a full cycle...well, it's maddening. Not to mention a little scary.

This week was nice, though. I'm not sure exactly what it was, but in the course of tweaking and fixing stuff over the last few days, it's become clear the baby steps have combined to make a few huge strides. Instead of a bunch of stuff that doesn't work, we have a bunch of stuff that does—and while the game still isn't free of bugs or other annoyances, it's become clear what's left for us to polish.

And even better, you can play through a level and actually have a good time. Which, for somebody who places fun over almost everything else, makes me a damn happy man.

Ryan Lockhart (lockhart@sevenstudios.com) enjoys the fact he can rotate the game's camera without it getting stuck on every wall. Ah, progress!



Onimusha 3



Magical Ninja: Jinrai



Resident Evil: Outbreak



Monster Hunter



Hyper Street Fighter II



Mega Man X: Command Mission

MONSTROUS SUPPORT

Zombies, dragons, and street fighters bolster Capcom's TGS lineup

What's more made of Square Enix's presence before the start of this year's Tokyo Game Show, Capcom easily takes the prize for having one of the best PS2 lineups at the event. Here's a look at what was on display.

Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition. Similar to the *Darkstalkers* compilation released for Dreamcast a couple of years ago, the game lets you choose any version of a *Street Fighter* character, so the original incarnation of Guile could be used against a Super *Street Fighter II* Turbo version of Ryu. Not surprisingly, it includes a variety of extras, like a gallery mode, original music, and the full *Street Fighter II* animated film. *Hyper Street Fighter II* will be hitting stores in 2004.

Mega Man X: Command Mission.

Capcom takes all the action of the previous *Mega Man* games and squeezes it into a standard RPG. Each member of your three-man party will not only have standard attacks, but also special attacks that can be executed by pressing different button combinations. We're carrying over all the traits of the *Mega Man* series and bringing them into an RPG setting, says Producer Tatsuya Kitabayashi. "We're making it in a way fans will appreciate and like." Look for it in 2004.

Magical Ninja: Jinrai. The last of the previously unannounced titles, this 3D action game features the work of Maximo artist Susumu Matsushita, and will take place in a fantasy world with mythical enemies and locations. The main character will have a full range of classic ninjutsu skills, such as hanging on ceilings and disappearing in a cloud of smoke. Its cooperative mode lets you and a friend team up as two ninjas, but one person can also play as a monster.

Monster Hunter. Speaking of monsters, this online RPG is one of the most impressive games in Capcom's library. *Monster Hunter* will have a sim-

gle-player mode, but the on-line action looks too intense to pass up. You and three other players will join forces to explore the land and stalk dragons with the goal of slaying the massive beasts. The new demo at TGS showed off all sorts of interesting game features, ranging from huge traps to different types of hunting techniques.

Resident Evil: Outbreak. Monster isn't the only one, he game. *Resident Evil: Outbreak* is a major part of Capcom's on-going push in our conversation with Producer Tsuyoshi Tanaka, he revealed that sections of the game are being designed by different people who worked on previous *Resident Evil* games, so each will present a unique interpretation on the type of fear *Resident Evil* tries to create. Capcom also plans to expand on *Resident Evil: Outbreak* in the future with add-ons and sequels.

Omnimusha 3 and Omnimusha Blade Warriors. Producer Kenji Inafune says work's continuing on both games. His team has just started on *Omnimusha 3*'s CG sequences, which will be overseen by a famous Japanese movie director and include motion capture supplied by an action star. Inafune also pushed the idea of *Omnimusha 3* as two separate games, since Suyama and Jacque Bracq (Jean Renol) present different gameplay experiences.



TWO NIGHTMARES

Kingdom Hearts II won't be the only one to continue the franchise. *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* will be released in 2004, and *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep* will be released for another year. Look for it in 2005.

FINAL FANTASY X-2

IT'S NOT OVER.

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Suggestive Themes
Violence



Dolby Digital Surround EX

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PlayStation.2



• REC

THEY JUST KILLED CASH.

NOW THEY WANT TO KILL HIM AGAIN.

AMERICA IS FULL OF RUN DOWN, BROKEN RUST-BELT TOWNS WHERE NOBODY CARES AND ANYTHING GOES.

IN CARCER CITY, NOTHING MATTERS ANYMORE AND ALL THAT'S LEFT ARE CHEAP THRILLS.

THE ULTIMATE RUSH IS THE POWER TO GRANT LIFE AND TAKE IT AWAY, FOR SPORT. THIS TIME JAMES EARL CASH, YOU ARE THE SPORT. THEY GAVE YOU YOUR LIFE BACK. NOW, THEY ARE GOING TO HUNT YOU DOWN.

YOU AWARE TO THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN PANICKED BREATH.

YOU MUST RUN, HIDE AND FIGHT TO SURVIVE.

IF YOU CAN STAY ALIVE LONG ENOUGH, YOU MAY FIND OUT WHO DID THIS TO YOU.

THE FINAL CUT



Strong Language
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation 2

30.03

11:09:37

78

MANHUNT

REC

SAVE



WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT



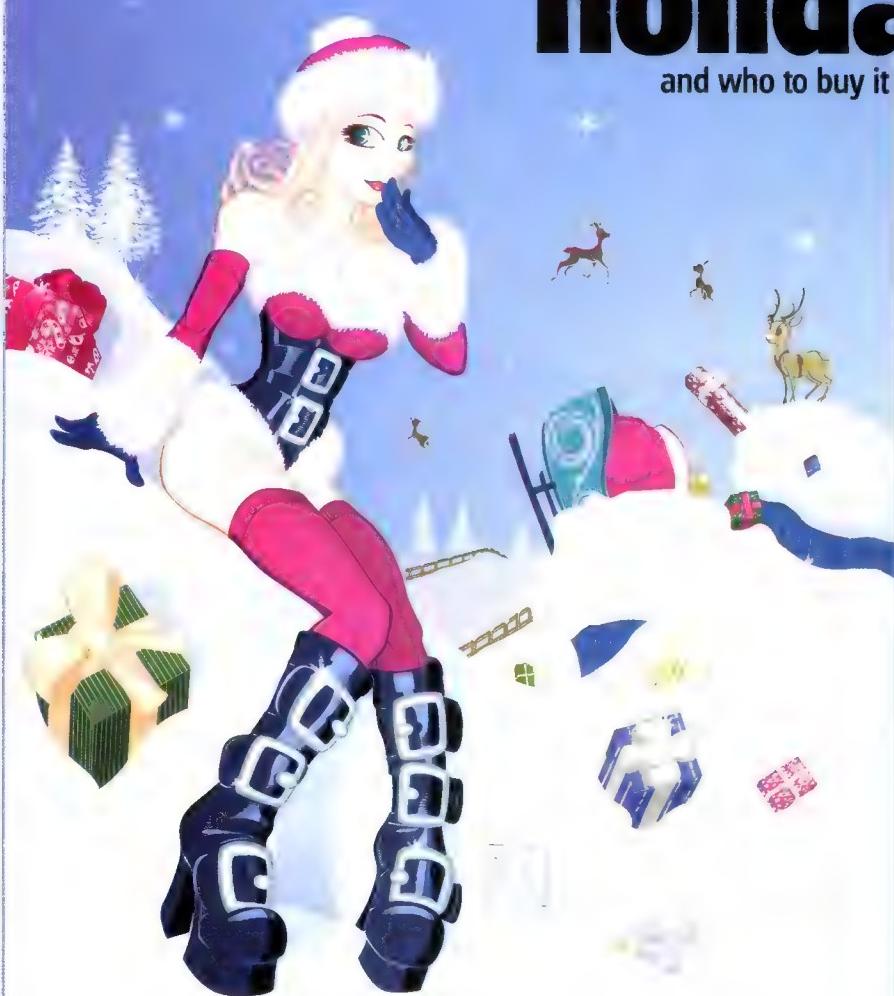
Note: Rockstar will be following ESRB guidelines for M rated games in the marketing of this game. This game contains violent language and behavior and may not be appropriate for persons under the age of 17. The story, names and incidents portrayed herein are fictitious. No identification or similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is intended or should be inferred. Any resemblance is coincidental. The names and publications of this videogame do not in any way constitute, condone or encourage this kind of behavior.

what to buy this holiday

and who to buy it for

Struggling to decide what you should buy? That's understandable. Lots of games were released this year, and the holiday season will see more than 10 games hitting stores every week. To make life easier, we've done your shopping list for you. We even broke it down so you know what kinds of games will work for different personalities...

Illustrations by
Jason and Heather Martin





Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando

There is no evidence whatsoever that either Ratchet or Clank are embarking on their adventures sans undergarments. We've devoted considerable resources to the research, and it's clear that the title is misleading.

SOCOM II

Buy this, go online, find a room with OPM™ in the header, and someone from this magazine will gladly hand you your ass. We'll even gift wrap it for you. Best Online Shooter Ever. Read our review this month. If you want more reasons to buy it?

War of the Monsters

dealtly suited for gamers with a sense of humor or irony. The 50s schlock sci-fi theme isn't to everyone's taste, but the city smashing gameplay is incredibly satisfying. It also features a 50-foot-tall fighting monkey, and that has to count for something, doesn't it?

007: NightFire

Buy this for anyone you know that does a half-decent Sean Connery impersonation. Yeah, thank you for purchasing the *James Bond* game for me, Mish Moneypenny! I would you like me to kiss you under the mistletoe?

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

Anyone who's not excited about the movie is clearly ill, so the opportunity to completely ruin the surprise by playing the game a month earlier is something no one will want to pass up.

Time Crisis 3

What's not to like about pointing a brightly colored plastic gun at your TV screen and then shooting at bad guys? The game's a great gift because it comes in a really, really big box. People like getting gifts in big boxes. Stick a big bow on it and you're set!

Freedom Fighters

A good-looking shooter in which you can get people to join your gang just by looking at them a certain way. Thank God real life doesn't work like that. Scooter would have a permanent angry posse that he'd refer to as the Bon Vivant.



WANTS TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD™

Magic Pengel

Officially the most clever idea for a videogame ever. You draw your character and then make him fight—although the drawing stuff is so cool, you may forget about the fighting altogether.

RPG Maker 2

If there was an award for most complicated videogame ever conceived, *RPG Maker 2* would win it. It's difficult to get into but perseverance reaps big rewards. Playing an RPG you made yourself is quite a trip.

The Sims

Who doesn't like telling people when they should go to the toilet? It's like the ultimate power trip. Enjoy this and other super-finally-boring things in one of the most strangely compelling games of the year. Perfect for any obsessive-compulsive friends or relatives.



Dark Cloud 2

The first *Dark Cloud* was great—but the sequel is absolutely fantastic. The cartoon-style visuals give it charm, and the game play depth means it will get plenty of play time. You'll get to build big robots by taking photographs of things.

HAS SEASON TICKETS



Madden NFL 2004

Chances are, you've bought this already—at least count, EA Sports had already sold 2 million copies. Still, if you're looking to endear yourself to a football fan, there's little more you could do.

ESPN Football

except maybe introduce them to Sega's pigskin game. It plays a little differently than *Madden*, and some people swear they prefer it. Does anyone really need two football games? No, but this isn't about need—it's about look and feel and all that good stuff. Sega's game rocks, and the hardcore love it.

ESPN Basketball

There are plenty of b-ball games to choose from (see our Reviews section this month, but Sega has made the best every year since b-ball games began. This is the year to buy for people who take it all really seriously.

Tiger Woods 2004

It's official: Golf is fun. It's especially fun with a DMX soundtrack, online competition, and the option to create a perfect replica of yourself. This game will single-handedly make getting hip.

NBA Street 2

EA Sports Big proves that it's better at street ball than it is at proper basketball, which is surprising considering that EA is a megacorporation, and hardly anything about it is "urban" or "street." This is one of those games that even non-sports gamers will get a kick out of. Cool soundtrack, too!

Winning Eleven 6

This game's name takes up so much space that we refuse to print it in its entirety. What you need to know is that this is the best soccer game ever made. Yes, *FIFA* is good (especially *FIFA 2004*, which is awesome), but this is better.

NBA Live 2004

Some people will play only the EA Sports games, so bear that in mind while gift-shopping for Mr. Awkward. In the past, their strategy has become stuck in regard to b-ball, but this year is different.



LOVES TO TURN UP A PARTY



Soul Calibur II

Soul Calibur is up to draw a crowd is matched only by its ability to rip up its players and turn even the most timid gamer into a savage, ultracompetitive maniac. Pass the pain and play; winner stays on. We guarantee you can't play just once, and that's just in the two-player mode.

VF4: Evolution

If beating people with swords isn't your bag, then surely, pummeling them with your bare hands is the next best thing. We've killed hours playing VF4 and can't think of any reason why you shouldn't too. Plus, it's a bargain, too!

Ape Escape 2

Everyone loves monkeys, and apes are the next best thing. So it stands to reason that everyone will want to play a game that stars a whole bunch of apes, right? Right! If you like fun, you'll almost certainly like *Ape Escape 2*.

Eye Toy

Invite some friends over, plug in your Eye Toy, and Wishy Washy alone will break the ice. When all you have to do is wave your arms around, no one has an excuse not to have a good time. Do your parents play videogames? Put them in front of this and they'll graduate to Growlaser before you know it.

TimeSplitters 2

What could be more fun than running around shooting at things? Playing with three friends and shooting at them instead, that's what. *TimeSplitters 2* still has the best Deathmatch mode on PS2 Why? Because it's fast and fun.

DDRMax 4

It has been brought to our attention that girls like to dance. Consequently, this game brings together two of our favorite things: videogames and the chance to encourage girls to dance around while playing them.



Karaoke Revolution

Some people need persuading to sing in front of friends, but once they do, they'll have a great time. It's all about having fun, so who cares if you miss every note? Even real rock stars like to play this game. See page 62.



THE WORLD'S MOST ELITE COMMANDO UNIT
IS LEAVING THE JUNGLE.

SEAL TEAM
VI



ONLY TO ENTER ANOTHER ONE.

SOCOM II
U.S. NAVY SEALS

PLAYERS EVERY PENNY



Final Fantasy X

You get an awful lot of game for your \$20 when you buy *FFX*. That's a dollar for every two and a half hours of play. Where else can you get value like that? Hmmm... Nope, I can't think of anything... other

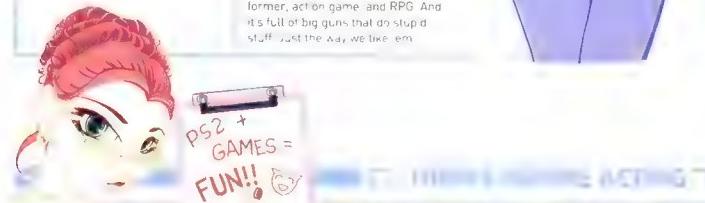


Jak and Daxter

It's half the price of the sequel, and we actually think it's a better game. It's not as dark or edgy as *Jak II*, but it's a solid platformer with some really great graphics, and Daxter has his name featured in the title, just as he deserves.

Ratchet & Clank

If you didn't play the original but the sequel has you interested, why not blow \$20 on the original and bask in the knowledge that you own every *Ratchet* game ever made? It's a great mix of platformer, action game, and RPG. And it's full of big guns that do stupid stuff just the way we like 'em.



XenoSaga

Namco's epic certainly gives you plenty of time to think before you act. It also gives you time to put the kettle on, make a cup of tea, do the laundry, and take a nap. Nongamers refuse to believe it has hour-long cut scenes. Believe, damn it. Believe.

Disgaea

One of the best (and only) tactical RPGs released this year, *Disgaea* also has the added advantages of an unusually cool ed name and exploding penguins that accompany you on your travels.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Ubisoft's fabulous stealth-em-up arguably out-Meta-Gears *Meta-Gear* and has proven itself to be the thinking man's action game with gorgeous graphics, a compelling story, and a tight-fitting rubber suit.



Dynasty Tactics 2

It's like the *Dynasty Warriors* games without the weird and crazy fighting action. A tactical combat game that's even more enjoyable if you have facial hair to stroke while pondering your next move.

Arc the Lad

One of the big RPG surprises of the year, this is the gift to get for those who really take their role-playing seriously. It has a great story, and visual's as most as good as those in the *Final Fantasy* games. It's arguably better than the old PS1 games, too. That's hardcore.

Step into the boots of a SEAL team in *SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS* and face the ultimate challenge: urban combat.



Developed in association with the U.S. Navy SEALs, *SOCOM II* is close-quarters combat at its most realistic. Invisible snipers lay in wait. Enemies lurk around every corner. And every civilian could be a friend or foe. Stealth is your greatest weapon.



Wage urban war in single-player mode. Or go online and play with and against up to 16 total players. Either way, a SOCOM-compatible headset will help you communicate and work together as a team. Remember, together you stand. Divided you don't stand a chance.



Take the war on terror to the enemy on 12 intense international missions.

Command. Courage. Country. Hoo-ah.

SOCOM II



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PLAY IN OURS.

PlayStation 2

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MATURE 17+



Blood
Violence

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WANTS TO GET LOST IN A GOOD STORY

**Beyond Good & Evil**

The perfect game for anyone you know who complains about the inane nature of most action games, *BG&E* blends RPG and action-game elements with a genuinely compelling story.

.hack (series)

By February of next year, the entire tetralogy will have been released, along with several anime DVDs and a manga series through Tokyopop. If you like your gaming mythos deep, it doesn't get more ambitious than this.

The Getaway

Scripted like a London gangster movie and genuinely thrilling throughout, *The Getaway* is one of those games that film school graduates get excited about. We liked it because it didn't suck.

Primal

Primal isn't for everybody, but even gamers who hate slow-paced adventure games might just wanna give this one a try if for no other reason than its intriguing gothic plot and heavy metal soundtrack.



LIKES THINGS FAST AND FURIOUS

**Dynasty Warriors 4**

Asian men in really, really bad hats running around impaling each other on long pointy sticks. If you like your fighting games to involve killing thousands of people and big, silly hats, then this is the game for you, without question.

Midnight Club II

If you know someone who makes you nervous when they drive at night, don't buy them this game. It'll only make things worse—especially when they start trying to jump over buildings. It has a badass online mode too, in which everyone gets together to ignore the rules and just drag race. Cool!

SSX 3

The best snowboarding game, ever. It's official—because we said so. Buy it for people who like snowboarding, or for those you've more than once heard used the word "gnarly" as an adjective.

Need for Speed: Underground

If you know someone who drives a Subaru Impreza WRX or a Mitsubishi Evolution, just put this magazine down now and go out and buy them this game. They'll thank you for it.

Zone of the Enders: 2nd Runner

This game is so fast, we don't think anyone actually knows what they're doing when they're playing it. It's all instinct—or some kind of weird ESP connection or something. It also features some of the coolest-looking robots this side of Jupiter.

**FFX-2**

Chances are, you've already read a thing or two about this game in this issue—there are only, like, a million pages or something devoted to it. What more do you want us to say? It's pretty good, OK? Plus, it features a bunch of girls who like to change their clothes a lot.

WHO ARE STUCK IN THE PAST?



Prince of Persia

Few games look better, and our reviews editor's so hooked on it that he keeps going back to play it again and again even though he's beaten it twice. Older gamers will appreciate the historical significance, and girls will appreciate that the hero takes his shirt off about halfway through

Shinobi

If you know someone with an unhealthy obsession with ninjas (it's surprising how many there are, see page 90) then Sega's remake is the gift for them. Wrap the game in a red silk scarf for added effect.

Rygar: The Legendary Adventure

It's about a man in a leather skirt attacking things with a giant spiky yo-yo. If you can get past that, it's actually pretty awesome. Do you remember the original, *Rygar*? Not many people do.

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night is one of PS1's best games, so if you know anyone who still won't shut up about that game, buy them this and keep them quiet for a couple of days. Great game, but the hero looks like a girl. Sorry, there's just no denying it.



IT HAS A CRIMINAL INTENT



Burnout 2: Point of Impact

All anyone ever wants is damage car games, and *Burnout* very happily obliges people in this regard. It also lets them drive very fast on the wrong side of the road, and who doesn't want to do that?

Hitman 2

Fans of the movie *The Professional* will get a kick out of *Hitman 2*—the eponymous hero is just as cool, as Jean Reno. There's no Natalie Portman and no milk consumption, but there are lots of guns and lots of really sickly murders with piano wire and stuff like that. Wow, we just said "sickly."

T.H.U.G.

We wouldn't normally associate a skating game with criminal activity but for some reason, *T.H.U.G.* lets you jack cars. Yeah, we aren't sure why, either. Fortunately, it's also the best skating game, and you can even build your own moves.

Grand Theft Auto Double Pack

We defy you to find a PS2 owner who doesn't own one or both of the GTA games already, but if you know someone new to the system, you could do a lot worse than buying them the *GTA Double Pack*.

Jak II

Jak and Daxter juice up or attitude, stomp stuff, and run away from the cops. It lacks the charm of the original game, but you do get plenty of challenge for your money. If you thought the original was too easy, this one will probably keep you busy for a while. We thought it was a bit tough, though



Def Jam: Vendetta

Hip-hop meets wrestling in the ultimate pop-culture crossover. You could've easily been lame, but EA Sports Big managed to suck up the Def Jam attitude and spit out an awesome brawler. Lots of celebrity contributions ensure that it has the right kinda vibe and plenty of cool tunes.

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SHOOTER



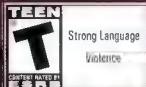
Stay out of harm's way while unleashing a barrage of blindfire.



Confront relentless, intelligent enemies.



Objects are your only allies.
Cover is your only saving grace.



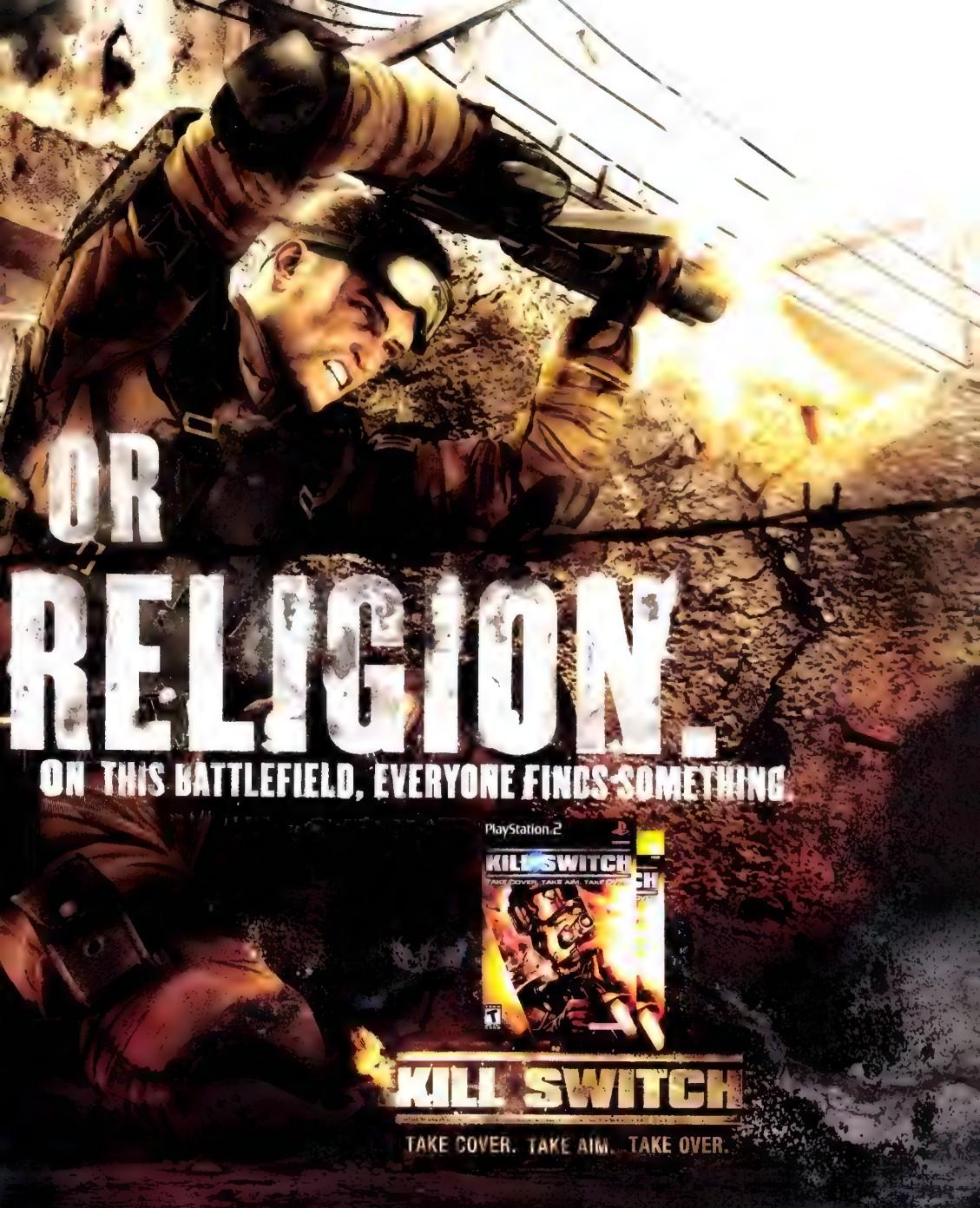
Strong Language
Violence



PlayStation 2

killswitch.com

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OR
RELIGION.
ON THIS BATTLEFIELD, EVERYONE FINDS SOMETHING

PlayStation.2



KILL SWITCH

TAKE COVER. TAKE AIM. TAKE OVER.

**Tekken A Break**

Tekken's Nina is taking a vacation from the fighting-game series to star in her own action game. Basic attacks can be executed using either of the two analog sticks, but Nina also has a special attack called Internal Destruction.

THE WATCHDOG**CURRENT EVENTS**

A videogame about 9/11: tasteless, or a way to bring home the event to a generation of gamers?

This is a topic I've been thinking about since I first heard about it earlier in the year. The story goes like this: Three UCSD students built a 9/11 mod of *Unreal Tournament* for a class. In the mod, players spawn on a floor of the World Trade Center on 9/11. There's no guarantee they'll find an escape route, so they might die in a fire or from the building collapsing on them. Or, when it's clear there's no escape, they might choose the option that many have chosen in real world—leaping from the building.

On the surface, it sounds like these kids have no comprehension of the tastlessness of their actions. But in an article in the *New York Times* in September, the mod-makers argued the point that building the mod was taking a critical historical event and translating it into a format gamers could understand. "The more I delved into the more personal it became," one of them said.

I don't like the idea of the mod, but I can't deny there might be something to the rationale behind it. A while back, I argued that having students try their hand at the D-Day level of *Medal of Honor* (in which one is certain to die several times before making it to the beach) could give today's kids an inkling of what the soldiers storming Normandy had to live though—or die in. It's difficult to imagine anyone needing a reminder of the visceral horror of 9/11, but maybe some people do. Or, as one goes on, maybe they will.

Part of the controversy is simply due to the format of videogames themselves. In the wake of 9/11, stories, music, and artwork poured out of the nation's creative class, and very little of that was accused of being tasteless. But videogames are obviously interactive, and most are not, to put it mildly, especially deep. The assumption is that videogames are simply games, and some events are too important to be played with a controller or mouse and keyboard. But there is no reason a videogame can't be more than a game as well.

I'm particularly struck by the fact that in the 9/11 mod, it's not always possible to find a safe exit. Given that every videogame is designed with a solution, the kids (and others) playing the mod might think it's totally unfair that no matter what they do, their onscreen character is going to die. In that respect—in the randomness and the unfairness of living and dying on 9/11—this mod hits on the truth of the event. And that's a lesson to be learned.

Can and should videogames replicate recent historical events like 9/11? Give your thoughts on the matter at the OPW message boards on www.10u.com or through e-mail at john@calz1.com.



Photo by Getty Images

GOING FOR THE WIN

EA Sports launches a new online service for its games, but how does it stack up against the competition?

Never content with taking a backseat, EA Sports has officially unveiled EA Sports Nation on www.espn.com/nation, a service for PS2, an online service that complements features integrated into the company's 2004 lineup of sport games. More importantly for EA, the service reinforces its commitment to building large communities around its already huge success sports prop-

ket share on the No. 1 console. The only pressure on us comes from the players. No one else comes close. The only pressure on us is from the players who want a better experience.

So, what can you do at the site? For starters, you can do some serious scouting on opponents in any of the 2004 games by reading up on the wealth of statistics available. You can also find out when tournaments are

information, and enhanced personalization. Players can't always be in front of their consoles, so Web interactivity gives them the opportunity to always be on in the community and interact in the community in new and enhanced ways, says Whetford. "It truly brings the online community to life and makes it more perva...ve."

This is all, just the start of the service. EA plans to integrate EA Sports

EA Sports has included voice communication, chat lobbies, tournaments, rosters, programs that target cheaters, and more.

etc. But the highlight between EA Sports Nation, My.road, EA.N, and Sega's ESPN V, is going to make it seem like the company is desperately playing catch-up. EA says that isn't the case.

Last year, we built the integration feature into our first few sports titles and the response from gamers was overwhelming. Just under 500,000 players registered to compete on *Madden NFL 03*, *NBA Live 03* online through the PlayStation 2, says Erik Whiteford, director of the EA Sports brand. EA got the No. 1 in an-

being held, or just read some general news. But in-game, EA Sports has included plenty of features, including voice communication, chat lobbies, tournaments, rosters, programs that target cheaters, and more.

It's interesting that Web integration has become a prevalent theme in sports titles, since they tend to reach much wider audiences, they present the perfect opportunity for developers to try to increase the community aspect. Web integration for PS2 online games provides a huge value add to the game via increased access,

Big games into EA Sports Nation, as well as possibly bring the service to other platforms, including Sony's upcoming handheld. "We want to lock down the core experience on PS2 before we start discussing other platforms," Whetford adds. "But the PSP sounds very interesting."

Of course, the issue of paying for EA Sports Nation has already come up—running online games tends to cost quite a bit of money—but EA will wait to see if enough people value the service enough that they'd be willing to pay for it.

**SAM CHAMPION**Perfect name for a video game character. See Special Report:
A Video Game by a Local N.Y. resident.

MARCH 22, 2002

ALICIA KEYS

Sister, So Be It

There's still time to get your copy of the new album.



FEEL THE PAYNE

Max is back to deal out a second helping of Payne

Take-Two Interactive has announced that the PS2 version of *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* is scheduled for a Dec. 2 release. The stylized third-person shooter from Remedy once again follows the adventures of cop-turned-

renegade Max Payne. The sequel's story features a much older and wiser Max pursuing a love interest as he fights the criminal element of New York City. Expect the same sort of graphic-novel-style storytelling present in the original game, as

well as the same intense gun fight. However, the sequel features some drastic improvements, including a revamped graphics engine and a new type of gameplay that lets Max roll along with a crew of characters...just to name a few.

PIT STOP

Gran Turismo 4 hits a speed bump

Sorry, race fans, but SCEA and Polyphony Digital have decided to hit the brakes on the North American release date for *Gran Turismo 4*. Neither company gave any specific reason for the delay; they simply changed the release date from

this winter to sometime in 2004. Japan will get a demo disc of sorts, called *Gran Turismo 4 Prologue*, which will have one course and one license, as well as a Time-attack mode, but chances of it coming over here are pretty slim.

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COUNTLESS AWKWARD PAUSES.**

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Volume One
Aqua Teen Hunger Force™
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CARTOON NETWORK



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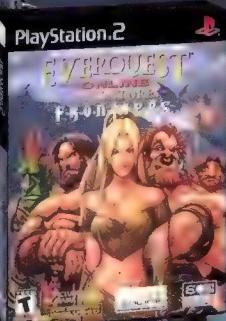
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Suggestive Themes

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Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

Conquer New Frontiers Online!

Heroes of a past age join the next generation of adventurers to conquer new Frontiers.



PlayStation.2





E.W. Hodderman/Banned and Edie Photos by Getty Images

We can't sing. We're willing to bet that you can't, either. Oddly enough, though, we can't get enough of Karaoke Revolution. Via the USB headset used in games like SOCOM, Konami's new music game awards you points for accurate pitch and rhythm as you sing along to more than 35 chart-toppers of the past few decades. ■■■ Our love for the game makes us wonder: What do well-known bands, those whose voices you'd actually want to hear, think of the game? We recruited members of R.E.M., Hoobastank, Gin Blossoms, and Barenaked Ladies—each of whom has a song in Karaoke Revolution—to answer that very question. ■■■ And to make things even more interesting, we turned it into a competition. In fact, it's a veritable...

battle of the bands

By Chris Balon

THE CONTEST RULES

Two bands will compete in a Karaoke Revolution tournament to see which band can sing better. Each band will sing three songs, and the band with the most points wins.

R.E.M. *"Losing My Religion"*



R.E.M.

Gin Blossoms



Gin Blossoms

Barenaked Ladies



Barenaked Ladies

Hoobastank

"You're right. You're not a good singer."

—Michael Stipe tells it like it is to OPM's Chris Baker



Both Michael Stipe (singing) and Mike Mills (on couch, legs crossed) would award four stars to Karaoke Revolution on the OPM scale.

R.E.M.

You'd think a band used to selling out arenas for the better part of the past two decades would feel most at home at Karaoke Revolution's Royal Hall, or even its Enormo Bowl. But, "I'm OK in the subway," R.E.M. frontman Michael Stipe tells us in reference to the game's Central Station. I like that can sing in a subway.

After viewing a stirring rendition of "Believe" by bassist Mike Mills ("I was channeling Cher"),

Stipe says, "It seems like the choruses are the easy part, because everybody knows that. And then the melodies are really locked in, and the verses are a bit harder."

Speaking of hard verses, keeping up with the lightning-fast words to "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And Fee-Fi-Fee)" is next to hopeless for the normal Karaoke Revolution player. Stipe makes it look easy, although, in watching him perform, one can tell he's not too concerned about singing the game wants him to. He's singing

just as he will to end the band's concert later this very evening. The end result: 10,964 points, A fine total, but one that certainly deserves to be higher.

Though he may have strayed from the game's second-by-second instruction, that doesn't necessarily mean Stipe could care less about how he's judged.

Halfway through, you're panicking because you're not doing very well, he comments. I like the crowd reactions to bad notes. "LOUSY!" laughs Mills. I think this game is hilarious. I think it's

lots of fun. I know a lot of people in my family who don't necessarily play videogames, but they love to sing karaoke. So I'll be getting this for my aunts.

Stipe says the state of the world—and Bob Dylan-inspired "End of the World" could he have even fathomed it would become a big draw in a videogame more than 15 years later? Mills can only laugh at the suggestion, but Stipe delivers the perfect straight-faced answer: I was praying for it almost nightly. ■■■

HOOBASTANK

F— you, Kansas!

Hoobastank's Chris Hesse has just had his first trial run with Karaoke Revolution, doing his best to keep in tune with the L.A. band's huge 2001 hit, "Crawling in the Dark." That's why I play drums," he says, after getting booted offstage at the County Fair.

That's exactly what I expected," adds lead singer Doug Robb, laughing at his bandmate's pathetic 1,664 points. "If they had, like, Karaoke Drumming, you should give that a chance. You know what would be really cool is if we went to a real karaoke bar and had me take, totally butcher the song.

When it's Robb's turn to perform the song he wrote to express

everybody's normal feelings of self-doubt, he certainly doesn't butcher the tune—it sounds great to us. The game doesn't think quite as much of his performance, though, awarding a mediocre 8,831 points in the end. As Robb surmises, you have to remember exactly how you sang on the record, because that's what the game's basing it on.

The game is awesome," comments Hesse. I probably wouldn't sit at home and play by myself, but it'd be a lot of fun for a party or something like that.

"My girlfriend doesn't play games at all, and she'd really crack up at it," says Robb, a gamer whose personality created Devry Institute now tops the polls in *NCAA Football 2004*. "It has nothing to do with videogames—it has to



Hoobastank singer Doug Robb (left) crawls in the dark as percussionist Chris Hesse plays the air drums.

HOW THEY SCORED

Song 1: "It's the End of the World As We Know It"
Singer: Michael Stipe
Score: 10,964

Song 2: "Believe"
Singer: Mike Mills
Score: 12,932

TOTAL SCORE: 23,057

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PlayStation®2



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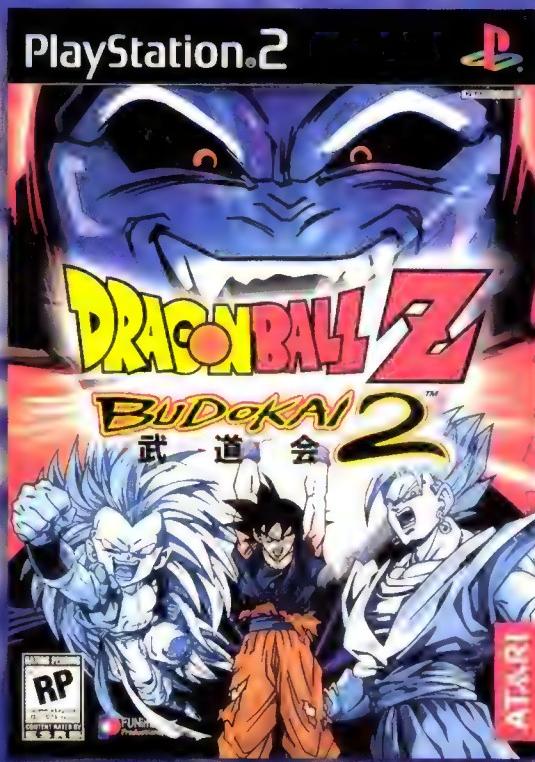
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BUSTIN' OUT

SIM FRIENDS
your girlfriend
will love The Sims:
Bustin' Out

1) SHE CAN SIM ONLINE WITH FRIENDS

For us PS2 gamers...you can actually take your Sim to the Internet. Online play is divided into two areas: trading stuff with other players and co-op play through the single-player game. The co-op play is pretty straightforward. Two Simmers can team up and beat the various level objectives faster, earning mad cash and unlocking new things. Say you're not a big Sim fan, but she wants someone to help her out. What then? Well, she can find someone online to play with, using the same kind of EA.com account and match-making service you find in EA Sports games. You can search for other Sims by name, appearance, and even astrological sign if you're so inclined!

It's the online trading that piqued our interest. Not many people have enough time to go through every single career track, visit every single new area,

and interact with every NPC in a game like this. You'd pretty much have to be obsessive and unemployed to try to unlock everything. So, those of us who Sim in moderation can now search online for other like-minded souls and swap fridges, robots, lamps, and other appliances.

2) SHE CAN LEAVE THE HOUSE WHENEVER SHE WANTS TO

Her Sim is no longer a worker bee who spends her day between the Men and Boys living room; there are 16 other houses for her to hop around in (there are also special mini-play houses for your Sims to luxuriate in). She has a more outgoing Sim, she can take her to Pixel Acres and lounge around in the nude. Or visit Club Rubb for some socializing. Or work out at Foame's Gym.

She can even get a date as she gets a free scooter very early on in the main game and

a sports car or a decked-out limo that has a hot tub on the roof.

3) SOMETHING SHE'S GOOD AT: SHOPPING!

The objectives-based structure of the main game dutifully dishes out new stuff left and right. Each locale has a whole bunch of unlockable objects that she'll get the opportunity to buy after completing certain tasks.

She can also go shopping for weird sonic shower that "rates" the dirt off of you.

4) THERE ARE ACTUAL CHARACTERS FOR HER TO MEET THIS TIME

She can meet a few

new faces in last game, such as the Goths and Mr. Malcolm Landgrabb (who's now the villain of the game). Now, get ready to meet 22 new individuals. Hey, all those places mentioned earlier

have to be staffed by someone. Besides pouring a lot of gory personality into these new characters, it's a welcome

change from the wacky queen

Jill. Maxis has ensured Sims to devotion

to work or acquire gourds.

If she hangs around with the crudgy and crusty Dudley, we'll teach her how to produce a good belch or two. If she parties with Bling Bling, he might teach her a few dance moves or heck her up with a turntable.

5) IT'S MORE OF A GAME THAN A TOY

The Sims on PC is more of a

game, and *Bustin' Out* improves

the best way to maintain the Sleep/Comfort/Social/Bladder/Food motives.

Want an example? Rather than taking the universal carpool to work, she now takes the bus to work. She's welcome to the world of commuting to work(), but she has to be sure to take the right bus. Different bus times go to different stops, and she can't board just

any bus. She can't even get on the bus if she's not dressed properly.

She can't even get on the bus if she's not dressed properly. If, for example, she's trying to follow the Mad Scientists' career path early in the game, she'll be able to unlock the rock-n-roll-prepped gnomes sooner.

BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE

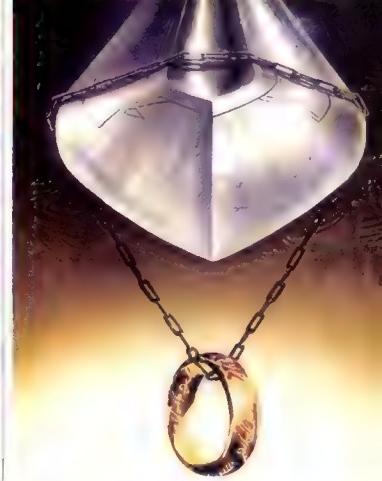
Though you start the game in your mom's house, there's no relation to that cinematic delight starring Martin Lawrence under heavy—and we mean heavy—makeup as Big Momma.



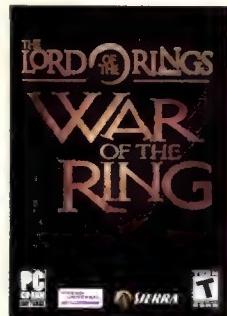
There are now more than 4,000
of Simlish coursing through the
game, and it's all thanks to the
work of our voice recording studio.

The actual process of recording
Simlish is simple but also incredibly
difficult; there's no Simlish-to-English
dictionary, nor is there a magical
Simlishifier that turns words into
gobbledygook. We spent some time in
the voice-recording studio, and the
directions we got were "just don't use
real English." That's right, all the
Simlish in the game is just Maxis
employees mumbling or yelling random
sounds, the results of which are
tweaked by audio engineers. It's harder
than it sounds, because it can be
difficult to convey actions like

the woman through
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ARCHITECT

Will Wright may not be the hands-on guy to pay for *The Sims: Bustin' Out*, but there's plenty of the game vision at Maxis. Employees often refer to him as the man behind the curtain, making everything Simulated runs smoothly. Making a name for himself with *SimCity*, Wright eventually went to create the ultimate crossover game: *The Sims* [heck, even chicks dig it!]. Even though he's working on his next über-project, he still has time to lend his brain to *Sims: Bustin' Out*:

Is there a unifying philosophy behind the entire (PC and console) *Sims* franchise?

If there is a unifying concept, I think it would be that we want:

"I view the console versions of *The Sims* as experiments in cross-breeding, to some degree."

players to own the world as much as possible.

What kind of thinking went into the two different directions of the PC and console versions of *The Sims*?

The first differences had to do with the players and the environment. Console players tend to be younger and are playing in a more social environment. Frequently, there are spectators watching over your shoulder as you play, and this influences how you relate to a game. I view the console versions of *The Sims* as experiments in cross-breeding, to some degree; we're trying to combine elements of the PC gameplay with other, more goal-directed and level-based games.

How do you think the online experience of *Bustin' Out* on the PS2 will compare with the ill-fated *The Sims Online*?

They are totally different beasts. One is about developing long-term relationships and achievement (*The Sims Online*), the other (*Bustin' Out*) is about playing together to unlock cool new objects and explore new locations.

How do you make your games so appealing to everyone, even the elusive female market?

Part of the trick here is to get more females involved in the development process. At Maxis, we've been lucky to recruit a high percentage of women onto our development teams. There is something of a chicken-and-egg problem to solve here. One of the reasons we attract more qualified women is because we are making the types of games they like to play, which then helps us to make just those types of games better.

From where do you draw all of your ideas?

Most of the ideas I bring to games come from books I read. I read mostly nonfiction—science, sociol-

ogy, biology—and find that many of the subjects I research are very compelling to me. I always feel a need to find ways to communicate these ideas to a wider audience.

What would you be doing if you weren't making games?

Probably making toys. Or perhaps making robots.

If you could go back and remake any one of your past titles, which one would it be and why?

I think I might remake *SimAnt* from a more immersive first-person point of view.

Do you have any advice for aspiring game designers?

Expose yourself to ideas, subjects, and design approaches from outside the games industry. There's a world of useful stuff out there for you to discover, and by pulling

from outside sources, you'll contribute to broadening games rather than inbreeding them.

Are there any other game designers you admire, and if so, why?

Yes, I have the utmost respect for Miyamoto-san of Nintendo; I love all of his games, and his craftsmanship is superb. I enjoy Sid Meier's games because he designs from the player's point of view. I like Peter Molyneux's games for their creativity and the detail he puts into his little worlds.

How did you get into the industry?

I bought my first computer to control robots that I was building at the time. After teaching myself to program, I found myself becoming more and more fascinated with the possibilities. I bought some of the first games at the time—the ones that came in Zip-lock bags—and became totally hooked on the idea of building these microworlds.

What's the last real game you'd play again?
I'm not sure what it is, but it's probably *SimCity 4*.

Will Wright
Social Engineer, Maxis
Career Highlights: *SimCity*, *SimAnt*, *SimCity 4*, *The Sims*



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Violence



PlayStation 2



One of the most important findings from the study is that the NC Policy Project's analysis of the NC Health Insurance Exchange Act found that the bill would not provide coverage to all individuals in North Carolina. The report found that the bill would leave many individuals uninsured, including those who are low-income, disabled, or elderly.



WHY? BECAUSE SQUENIX LIKES YOU!

Kingdom Hearts sequel gets the go-ahead at this year's TGS

Despite the fact that a trailer for the game was included in the international version of *Kingdom Hearts*, Square Enix repeatedly sidestepped questions about a *Kingdom Hearts* sequel, mainly because of complicated negotiations with Disney. But at this year's Tokyo Game Show, the company officially took the wraps off the game and even showed some video of the Disney and Square Enix crossover in action. "We have to deliver new products from the *Kingdom Hearts* world," said Square Enix President Yoichi Wada. The original game sold 1.3 million units in Japan and 2 million overseas, so there's evidence of great support for *Kingdom Hearts*.

Set shortly after the original, *Kingdom Hearts II* features the return of Sora, Kairi, Riku, and numerous Disney characters, including a version of Mickey Mouse that looks as though it was ripped straight from *The Matrix*. Although Tetsuya Nomura, director and character designer, helped shape Mickey's new look, Disney still maintains an active

role in the appearance of its characters. Our legacy of keeping Disney characters alive involves making sure they've been portrayed properly, said Graham Hooper, senior vice president and general manager of Buena Vista Games. But a lot of the ideas come from Tetsuya Nomura.

Unfortunately, Nomura and members of the *Kingdom Hearts* development team were tight-lipped about any additional details, but they did indicate the game will be ready for a 2004 release.



FLAMELINE OR ELITE?

It's been a year since the first *Final Fantasy VII* came out, and Square Enix has already announced a second game. The new game will feature a new protagonist, Aerith Gainsborough, and will be set in the same world as the first game. The game will also feature a new character, Barret Wallace, who is a member of the Avalanche resistance group. The game will also feature a new character, Barret Wallace, who is a member of the Avalanche resistance group. The game will also feature a new character, Barret Wallace, who is a member of the Avalanche resistance group.

DATA STREAM

About Time



Square Enix will be holding an official unveiling of *Final Fantasy XII* on Nov. 19. New characters and locations from the latest *Final Fantasy* are expected to be shown. Check www.1up.com for the latest.

Say What?



Sega of America has wisely decided to rethink the name for its *Shinobi* sequel. Instead of being called *Kunoichi*, the ninja action extravaganza will be known as *Nighthade* in North America.

Eye Got Rhythm



A European Eye Toy game called *Groove* will be the first title released for the peripheral to include licensed music from artists such as Madonna and Elvis.

Silent Film



Konami has signed away the film rights for its *Silent Hill* survival-horror series. The movies will be produced by the same man responsible for the *Resident Evil* film and its upcoming sequel. Look for a radical reinvention of modern cinema sometime soon.

Adventure is in the Eye of the Beholder.



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PlayStation 2



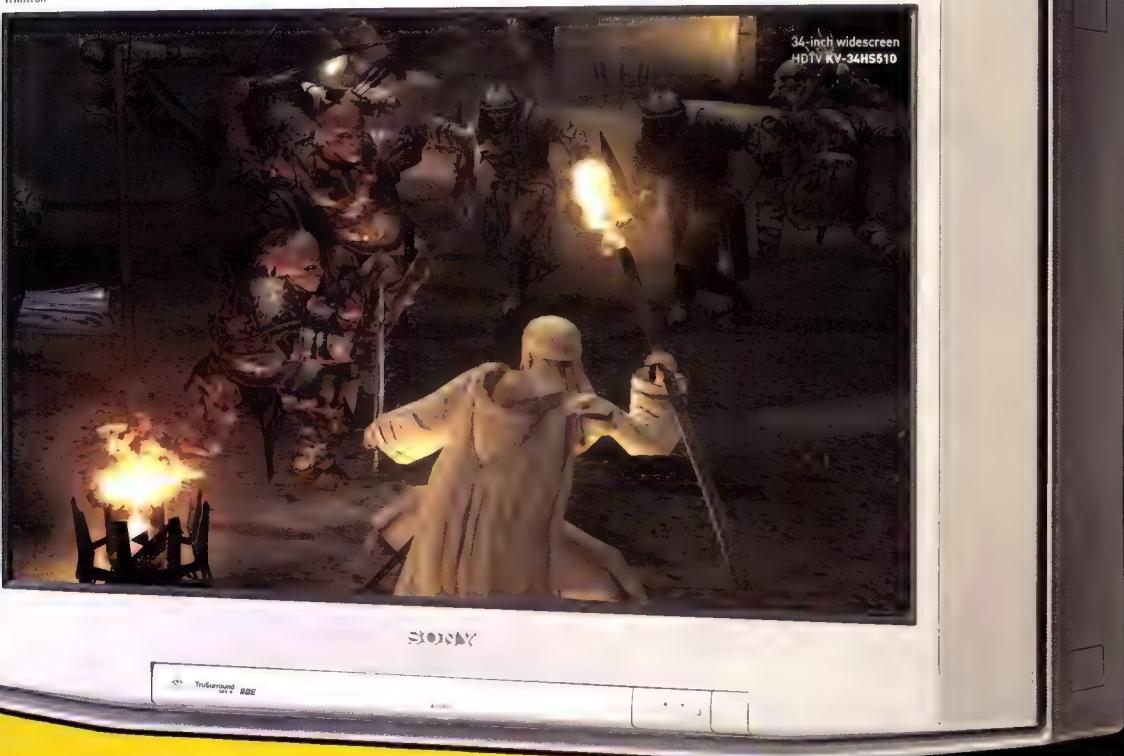
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Trinitron



the game pad

by Darren Gladstone

Get the picture?

Widescreen this, 480p that...man, the rocket scientists making television sets these days sure love throwing out terms and numbers that confuse the hell out of you. Walking into the electronics store, you know what you want: the biggest, deepest monster of a television you can squeeze into your tiny apartment to make your PS2 games look brilliant. Truth is, you need to consider many factors when buying a set, and there's no way to sum it up in two pages. So, we're going to break this up into digestible chunks. This month, we're answering the basic questions, so you know where to start looking in the electronics store this holiday season (hint: it's the area where they stash all those big boxes that glow and show moving pictures). In the next few months, we'll give you specific tips about different types of televisions and what you need to build your own killer game pad.

\$500

The price of a 12-inch black-and-white Philco TV back in 1950, which would be, like, a billion dollars today!

US YOUR QUESTIONS!

E-mail our resident expert at daren_gladstone@ziffdavis.com, and we'll answer all the reader questions in an upcoming issue.

Up to \$500

- Curved tubes: Up to 32 inches
 - Flat tubes: Up to 24, plus some 27-inch sets
- This is your entry point. HDTVs aren't this cheap yet, so know what you're getting into. HD will become the standard within a few years. If you're ready to accept that, check out Sony's KV-27FS100, which we've seen selling for about \$450. It may be an analog set, but with picture quality this tight, you won't mind missing an HD



ACT LIKE YA KNOW...

While we're not dipping into DLP projectors—that's a whole other issue—let's check out what lurks behind the boob tube on some different sets:

- Curved tubes up to 40 inches: Employed in the cheaper stuff, so don't expect HD here. These holdover CRT (cathode ray tube) sets will eventually be phased out.
- Flat tube (up to 36 inches): The current vogue in most televisions. They reduce glare and have much better viewing angles. More people can squeeze around the set to watch. While there are normal flat-tubed sets, you'll also find many HD sets with flat tubes.

- Rear-projection (40 inches and up): Big and impressive, these guys deliver an awesome picture. Just beware of burn-in on CRT-based rear-projection televisions. Imagine dropping upwards of two grand only to have a marathon session of *Soul Calibur II* kill the thing.

- LCD (10 inches and up): These are employed in those sexy flat-panel displays. Some are tiny displays perfect for popping into the car, while others are massive enough for your living room. Prices are coming down, but you're still going to see 30-inch sets in the \$4,000 range.

- Plasma (about 42 inches and up): Buy a plasma television or a used car—your call. Sleek as hell, these ultra-thin sets have fine pictures but get damn pricey damn quick. One warning: We doubt you'll be playing one game non-stop for a couple days, but you could run the risk of burn in.

\$500 TO \$1,000

- Curved tubes: Up to 36 inches
- Flat tubes: Up to 36 inches
- HDTV: Up to 32 inches, plus a few 36-inch sets
- HDTV Rear Projection: 40 (and a few 52) inches
- LCD: Up to 15 inches

This is when you start getting a taste of the better things in the larger tubes. HDTV, and maybe a modest LCD panel. You may be tempted to go for the gusto and get a 36-inch set, but pause for a moment. If you want a sharp picture coming from a television you won't have to chuck in a couple of years, consider a 30-inch HDTV. Prices are coming down, and you can get a decent HD set like Samsung's TXN3071WHF for just under a grand



\$1,000 TO \$1,600

- Curved tubes: Up to 36 inches
- Flat tubes: Up to 32 inches
- HDTV: 27 inches, plus some 30-inch sets
- LCD: Up to 15 inches

Now we're talkin'! If you can live without a widescreen set, they're best for DVD junkies; go for a good 32-inch HDTV. Or, if you're feeling dangerous, get a rear-projection set—just beware the chance of burn-in (look to the left for more on that). Our choice here just tops the \$1,500 price point, but Toshiba's 32HFX73 is definitely worth it. Over the years, Toshiba's produced some consistently awesome sets. Their strong point: true black color signals, so dark scenes don't get washed out. Perfect for all those dark, dark PS2 titles.



OVER \$1,600

If you're planning to spend that kind of scratch on a television, stop reading this magazine for home theater and go someplace like www.hometheatermag.com. Seriously, we don't have the room to go into the detail these awesome televisions deserve. Plasma sets of all shapes and sizes, handsome-looking HDTVs, wide-screen LCDs you can hang on the wall—you're not going to get any of these without dropping a couple thousand bucks. A reasonable set we currently dig (again!) from Sony The 36-inch wide-screen HDTV KV-34HS510 (left) is not only easy on the eyes, but it also delivers a good picture and has plenty of inputs on the back for everything in your home theater. And considering the performance, \$2,000 asking price ain't all that bad.

IS DIGITAL TV REALLY THAT GOOD?

The short answer is "yes." All you need to know for now is that it makes the picture look damn pretty. But here's the obvious problem: HDTVs are expensive—and they're going to remain expensive for the immediate future. Another problem most people don't consider: A good HD set will shine a too-bright spotlight on a crappy picture. Without a component AV cable for your PS2, it'll look like you're watching your games through a cheese grater. Analog TV? Forget about it. Without an HD-signal decoder (usually sold separately) and a pure source like digital cable, your eyes will start bleeding from all the onscreen imperfections.

HOW BIG IS BIG?

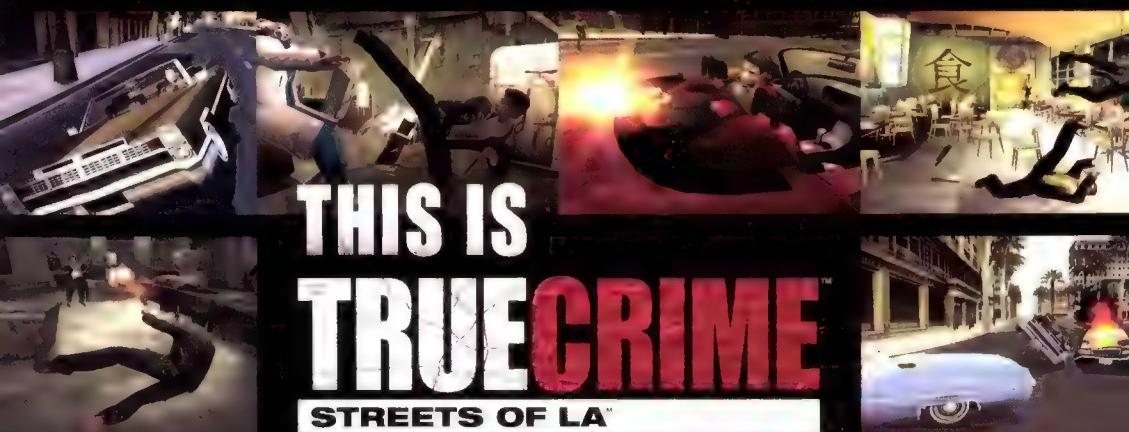
That's a very good question—for those with lots of money to burn. The short answer: Don't be tempted by that gorgeous 55-inch plasma set at the store. You need to consider not only the size of your room, but also how close you're sitting to the set.

OK, SO HOW MUCH IS THIS GONNA COST?

It always comes down to the dollars. You've got a budget, and you want to get the best you can for the money. So, in order to keep you from openly weeping at the store, check out our handy breakdown of how much you can expect to spend on different sets. (Of course, prices change—just consider this an approximate range.) Don't say we didn't warn you....

LOS ANGELES

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PlayStation 2



Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

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SOUNDTRACK ON
VYBE SQUAD KOCH RECORDS




More FFX-2

Japan's getting a new version of *FFX-2*, called *Final Fantasy X-2 International Last Mission*. It has two new costumes (one is called the "Psychic") and a new quest. It probably isn't coming out in North America. No fair!

ONLY IN JAPAN

GEGEGE NO KITARO
KONAMI

"I see dead people," the famous line goes. Kitaro, star of Konami's new simulation RPG *Gegege no Kitaro*, has the same problem—he sees ghosts all the time. That might seem natural when you consider that he's a monster himself, but it gets a bit odder when you factor in the fact that his father is an disembodied eyeball who lives in Kitaro's left eye socket. All this wackiness is based on one of Japan's best-known horror animes (think *ghost stories*), penned by the truly insane Shigeru Mizuki. The anime—lapping into a strong Japanese cultural belief in *yokai* (spirits)—hit it really big in the 1980s, with predictable NES and Super NES games released to capitalize on the popularity. Now that the anime is enjoying a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*-esque revival, it's not surprising to see that a PS2 game will hit Japanese stores in December. The art of the series has been faithfully reproduced—check out those awesome hand-drawn characters in the screenshots—but the game has been given a modern makeover. On his quest to hunt down and defeat evil spirits, Kitaro has two new companions: a mobile phone and a laptop. They're a far cry from the unlicensed nuclear accelerators of *Ghostsbusters*, but they're apparently effective nonetheless, equipped to sniff out ghosts in their hiding spots. Despite being equipped with these mechanical companions, Kitaro can't surf the Web or chat for hours with his girlfriend. But he can morph into various "jobs" to perform attacks—jobs like a juggler (surely not the most intimidating). You could liken it to *FFX-2*'s dress-up system, but without the bevy of hotties changing into different outfits. Details remain sketchy on where the "simulation" aspect comes into play (is it possible for a ghost-hunting game featuring a monster hero with a dad in his eye to be a simulation at all?), but the kooky humor, art, and generally spooky vibe of this RPG look good to us. Pity that look is all we can do: Konami hasn't announced this for the United States, and it probably won't.

I WAS BORN A SPIRIT

Kitaro's creator, Shigeru Mizuki, doesn't just write about spirits—he actively believes in ghostly happenings. At the height of the series' popularity, he claimed that spirits were overrunning his own body. With the rebirth of Kitaro, Mizuki is enjoying another spell in the spotlight. He recently spoke at the International Spirits Convention and also released his autobiography, aptly entitled *I Was Born a Spirit*. Incidentally, Mizuki also reckons that cities are "scabs on the earth," draining away the planet's life-force. *FFVII*, anyone?



SENSORY OVERLOAD

Didn't go to the Tokyo Game Show? We've compiled 10 of the coolest moments from Japan's biggest gaming event

THE CROWD

The first day of the show is reserved for members of the press, but on days two and three, the floodgates are opened, letting literally thousands of overexcited children, cosplayers, and all sorts of gamers. It's amazing to see so many people, but they make it nearly difficult to actually play any of the games.

HIDEO KOJIMA

As you'd expect, the creator of *Metal Gear Solid* is quite a popular man just before the show started; he was spotted standing next to Dennis Dyack in front of the *Snake Eater* trailer wall. He also took some time to do a stage interview, drawing dozens of fans to look at his face on an enormous screen.


VIDEOGAME CHARACTERS

There's something incredibly scary about seeing giant videogame characters walk around the show floor. Even more frightening: There's someone actually inside those freaky costumes. But hey, everyone loves monkeys, especially monkeys wearing shorts!

**METAL GEAR SOLID 3:
SNAKE EATER**

Kojima showed two MGSS3 trailers at the Tokyo Game Show. One was the same trailer from ECTS, while the other was a slightly edited version of the E3 trailer with scenes showing Snake's proficiency with a knife. You'd think it would have the biggest crowd until you ventured over to...


MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

Um, what is this doing here? Needless to say, the *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* booth was quite surreal, right, as booth workers marched around in uniform in an attempt to coax people to play a game set in the Japanese jungle. J-hype, hey, look. Cosplayers!

JAMES BOND

EA definitely gets extra points for having one of the coolest booth setups at TGS. The *James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing* area was basically a bar where people had to play the game while sitting next to ladies in fancy dresses. Seeing young children at this booth procured quite amusing

NAMCO

Similar to Banda and Konami, Namco's most popular sector on the video wall. Here, attendees got a chance to take a look at the recently announced action-on-game featuring *Tekken 5*. The CG cut-scenes were pretty cool looking, but the gameplay seems a little rough at the moment.

BOOTH BABES

Yeah, yeah. We ogled at the gorgeous women representing various companies on the show floor. After all, I wouldn't be a truly worthwhile TGS experience if we didn't

100x

The number of times faster
the rumored PS3 processor is,
compared with the latest Pentium.

PlayStation.2

Clich MacLaver's

GOSSIP GOSSIP

All the muck that's fit to rake

As all the big names for the holiday season start to turn up in stores, we get ready for the onslaught in 2004 and beyond. As always, continue to check next-generation PlayStation.com for very much on the agenda.

THE PS3 NEWS CONTINUES

Last month, I explored much of what's happening with regard to

extra tidbits. While the machine's PS2 and PS1 compatibility has been a point of interest, I've been waiting to see how it will affect UMD code. It's unlikely that the system will ship with the ability to run UMD discs. But, if Sony continues to explore the possibilities of downloadable content that is then transferred to UMD (imagine PSP games

distributed much like digital music), it's entirely possible that you'll be able to use PS3 to download the game code and store it on the hard drive. And if you can store it, why not play it, too? Considering PS3 is significantly more powerful than PSP, it isn't too much of a stretch imagining its ability to emulate its baby brother. As usual, Sony is tight-lipped about the more radical ideas floating around, since they may not all make it into the final box, but the frequency with which we're hearing about new concepts indicates Sony is hinting at some kind of announcement. As I've said before, I'd be extremely surprised if it were 2004, there isn't some kind of early "official" PS3 announcement declaring the system's specs along with some appropriately unrealistic tech demonstrations.

WHAT IS PS2.5?

If you read some of this magazine's competition, you're probably getting used to constant references to something they're calling PlayStation 2.5. What on earth are they talking about? Nothing, that's what. There is no PS2.5. There is no jazzed-up version of the existing machine, one that's capable of fancier graphics or any other such nonsense. We'll see PSX in late 2004 (which is a PS2 in the same box as a gigantic hard drive boasting TiVo-like abilities, along with all kinds of media-server goodies) and then the full-on PS3 in 2005 or 2006. Don't pay attention to people who don't know what they're talking about.

POW



MULTIPLE BOXING SIMS IN '04
Expect boxing to make a comeback next year as the kings of sports games slug it out with each other to see who makes the best punching simulator.

STAB



RETURNING TO PERSIA

With *Prince of Persia* proving to be so good, it's hardly surprising that a sequel is already under way. Expect to see it out in time for the holidays next year.

RASH



BIKING AND FIGHTING

My contacts at EA plead ignorance when it comes to word on a new *Road Rash*, but I've heard it is going to happen and will be rolled out at E3 in May. Expect a *Need for Speed*-like transformation.



JAK III

THEINEVITABLE THIRD ONE
Don't be surprised if we hear news of a third *Jak* game in the next few months, as well as a possible *Jak* spin-off, most likely a vehicle-based game.



E-MAIL ME!

Get some good gaming gossip? If you hear anything juicy or get your hands on some cool screens or pictures, send me an e-mail at the following address:

clich_maclaver@ziffdev.com

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PlayStation.2
25th
10th Anniversary



DVD REVIEWS

By John Scalzi



X2: X-MEN UNITED

(Patrick Stewart, Hugh Jackman)

The *X-Men* movies are fairly dour as far as superhero films go, and you have director Bryan Singer to thank for that. Sure, the *X-Men* comics have always been about alienation and division, but at least they had bright primary inks and such. Singer, on the other hand, clads his heroes in moody blacks and blues and gives them sets to match. It works—the *X-Men* films come across as more weighty than they actually are—but when you get right down to it, after all the explosions, special effects, and cool mutant abilities, neither *X-Men* film is what you would call fun.

X2, for example, features not one but two attempted genocides, which is probably two more attempted genocides than most films (especially ones based on comic books) really need. Through it, Professor Xavier (Stewart) and his band of mutants save the world for the normal

people more out of a sense of duty than any real enthusiasm. Despite the action scenes and noble sacrifices from the "good" mutants, I eventually came away with the feeling that, ultimately, Magneto is right: The regular humans will never warm to the mutants,

Frankly, the mutants ought to corral the lot of them into, oh, I don't know, Iowa, and use the rest of the country as a mutant playground. I'm reasonably certain that's not what Singer is intending his films to convey, but that's what I'm getting out of them. *X2* is reasonably entertaining; I just wonder where the series is going to end up.

The DVD includes two sets of commentaries, 11 making-of featurettes (including several on Nightcrawler, the newest X-Man), deleted scenes, and still libraries.

Movie Score: ********

DVD Extras Score: ********



UPCOMING DVD RELEASES

November 4, 2003

Adam Sandler's
Eight Crazy Nights
The Anna Nicole Show:
Season 1
Finding Nemo
Legally Blonde 2
Star Trek DS9: Season 6
X-Files: Season 8

November 11, 2003

Dumb and Dumber
Friday Night
King of the Hill: Season 2
Terminator 3: Rise of the
Machines
Three's Company: Season 1

November 18, 2003

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider—
The Cradle of Life
The Lord of the Rings:
The Two Towers—Extended
Sinbad: Legend of the
Seven Seas
Space Ghost Coast to Coast 1
The West Wing: Season 1

November 25, 2003

Bruce Almighty
Dark Crystal
X2: X-Men United

BRUCE ALMIGHTY

(Jim Carrey, Morgan Freeman)
Would you trust Jim Carrey with the keys to the universe? The answer from *Bruce Almighty*: Sure if you want a world where dogs pee standing up. And who doesn't? Carrey is in *Liar, Liar* mode, not surprising, since this film has the same director and co-writer, acting wacky and zany but putting it together just in time for the heart-warming, feel-good. Just like an episode of *America's Got Talent*, that was a cheap shot. Anyway, this film is good, clean fun. If something theologically crazy suspect. Extras include outtakes, deleted scenes, director commentary and The Process of Jim. Guess what that is about.

Movie Score: ********

DVD Extras Score: ********

FINDING NEMO

(Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres)
Finding Nemo is widely hailed as Pixar's masterpiece, which is high praise considering the Toy Story films and Monsters, Inc. Visually, find no argument with this assessment. This is, simply, one of the

DID YOU KNOW?

Reese Witherspoon in the *Legally Blonde* movie and the person who

most beautifully animated films ever made, and like everyone, I want to live in that coral reef with all the pretty fishes. Storywise, however, it's not as strong as people let on. I don't know if anyone else has noticed, but Pixar's movies tend to be about someone trying to get home, and after four out of five films with the same theme, you look for a change. But, *Finding Nemo* is still very good, of course. If there's a kid in your living quarters, you'll be getting this. Resistance is futile. There are lots of family-friendly extras, including games, encyclopedia information about fish, a short film featuring Jean-Michel Cousteau, the animated short *Knick Knack*, plus a commentary, making-of and art documentaries, and—love it!—virtual aquariums.

Movie Score: ****
DVD Extras Score: *****

LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER—THE CRADLE OF LIFE

(Angelina Jolie, Gerard Butler)

This sequel is somewhat better than the original film, but considering what an incoherent mess that was, how could it not be? *Cradle of Life* has a director who actually knows something about action (Speed director Jan de Bont), and it has something akin to a plot: keep the bad guys from opening the Ark of the Covenant—oh, wait, I mean Pandora's box, but at the end of the day, it's still about pouring the delicious Angelina Jolie into something fulfilling, having her toss off a line in that sultry fake accent, and then letting her save the world through calisthenics. I know, I know. Why am I complaining? Yet I am. This was a flop—so that's the end of this series. Let's hope *Jolie* gets something action oriented, something not so aggressively blah. No extras were announced at press time.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: N/A

LEGALLY BLONDE 2: RED, WHITE & BLONDE

(Reese Witherspoon, Luke Wilson)

The *Legally Blonde* movies work only if you cut them a whole bunch of intellect-



tual slack. Suspension of disbelief is particularly important in this sequel, since the Washington, D.C., of this film is composed mainly of idiots and straw men specially designed for Reese's character (campaigning for animal rights) to blow past in a maze of pink. But Reese is cute and the film is fun, so most are willing to put up with a certain amount of thickheadedness in order to spend time in its company. Extras include a cast commentary, a Leah Remini video, deleted scenes, a gag reel, and a Delta Nu quiz.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: ***

SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS

(Brad Pitt, Catherine Zeta-Jones)

DreamWorks is still scratching its collective head as to why *Sinbad* flopped so horribly in the theaters. Well, guys, I'll tell you why—you're animation style is a lousy. Seriously. Alt. your "traditional" animation looks earnest and stiff, and it turns off the kids (lucky for you, Disney has the same problem at the moment). *Sinbad* has a cool story voice (Pitt and Zeta-Jones), and some great set pieces, and if you had drawn it like *Aladdin*, you'd be rolling in the dough. But you didn't, and took what it got you. Yes, I could be wrong. However, you were wrong, too, and it cost you more than my being wrong cost me. The DVD comes with commentaries, DVD-ROM games (including a PC-game demo...eww), making-of bits, and Easter eggs.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: ***

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

(Arnold Schwarzenegger, Claire Danes)

This *Terminator* installment feels surprisingly small and intimate, and it'll be the first to note that when one spends \$175 million on a film, small and intimate probably aren't the adjectives the filmmakers are aiming for. But what can you do? Even the biggest action scene in the film (involving a crane and several miles of breakable objects) seems contrarily like a miniature. Oddly, it suits the action and the characters well, especially considering what happens to John Connor (Nick Stahl) and his friend Kate (Danes) at the end. And it's a good send-off for Ah-nold's relationship with the Terminator character. Also, the new Terminatrix, mega-hot. The DVD includes cast and director commentary, special-effects features, bloopers and outtakes, and a special intro by Schwarzenegger.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: ***

SPACE GHOST COAST TO COAST: VOLUME ONE

(Space Ghost, Zorak)

Oh, God. Words cannot describe how

much I love *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* and not just because of the goofy real-life celebrity interviews, which are, truth be told, the absolute least interesting thing about the show. No, I love it because it provides proof for the old Hanna-Barbera dictum (promulgated in the dark ages of the '60s and '70s) that states if the writing is good enough, no one will notice the crappy animation. And it's true! *Space Ghost*, Zorak, and Moltar have 10 moves (at most) between them, and yet this show is one of the best animated TV series ever. The writing is just that good. If you don't rush out to get this and subsequent SGCC2 discs, you can't say you actually love animation. So there. The only extra is a commentary, but it's a pretty good one.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: ***

THREE'S COMPANY: SEASON ONE

(John Ritter, Suzanne Somers)

Like the rest of America, I'm still mourning the death of John Ritter, and frankly, my wife has been yelling at me to get rid of the shrine in the closet. Fortunately, this makes an adequate replacement. The first season of the series, which was actually just a six-episode tryout, features Jack, Chrissy, and Janet Joyce DeWitt being all klutzy, airheaded, and sensible, respectively. Are they as good as you remember, presuming you remember that far back? Eh, it's very '70s, which is a blessing and a curse. But Ritter is very good at physical comedy, and that's something that lasts. There are no extras.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: N/A

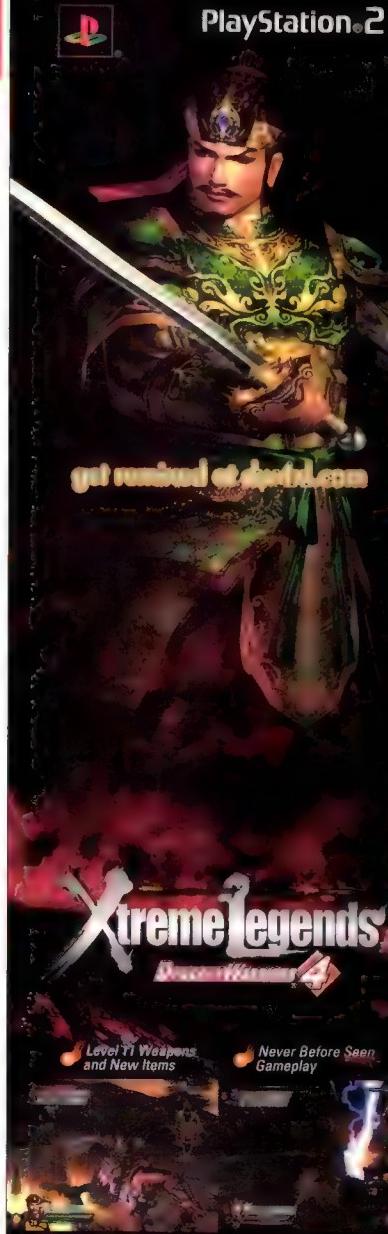
THE WEST WING: COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

(Rob Lowe, Martin Sheen)

I'm of the opinion that showing *The West Wing* to liberals constitutes cruel and unusual punishment because they want a president like Josiah Bartlet (Martin Sheen) so damn much that while the show is on, they probably sneak up and lick the TV screen in desire. And man, that's just sad. The first season of *West Wing*, like first seasons of most shows, is still working out the kinks (one of the kinks worked out Moira Kelly, who was booted at the end of the season), but the show also has most of the elements in place, including creator Aaron Sorkin's patented lightning fast dialogue, the excellent interplay between the cast, and, of course, the fantasy figure of Bartlet. Remember to Windex the television after watching. The DVD set features commentary on selected episodes, a few bloopers and outtakes, some making-of and behind-the-scenes stuff, and deleted scenes.

Movie Score: ***
DVD Extras Score: ***





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25th

Media 25 Anniversary



SOUND STATION

By John Scalzi

Starring Tony Hawk's Underground



Bad Religion: *No Control*

This album boasts 15 tracks in 26 minutes and 30 seconds.

Clearly, someone doesn't believe in the power ballad. And yet, in the span of a SpongeBob show, you get a nice, fast slug of unadulterated California punk stampeding by you, with lyrics about relationships and power and hypocrisy, which would qualify as retrospective if they were sung just a tiny bit slower (but then, that's what lyric sheets are for!) Bad Religion's been around in one form or another for two decades now, and *No Control* is a prime reason why. It's the punk, the whole punk, and nothing but the punk.



Jane's Addiction: *Strays*

Jane's Addiction's sellout album, in that it plays as a smoother, packaged parody of the earlier, freakier incarnation of the band it was produced by Bob Ezrin, for God's sake, who fairly defines the phrase "Rock Dinosauc." And you know what? It's still pretty damn good, because even tamed, the combination of Perry Farrell's adenoial shriek, Dave Navarro's Wall of God guitars, and Stephen's Percy's tub thumping skin work just flies right out of your speaker and shakes the back wall. And anyway, if anyone's going to rip off the band that made *Nothing's Shocking*, it might as well be Jane's Addiction.



Queens of the Stone Age: *Songs for the Deaf*

If Queens of the Stone Age accomplishes nothing else, it deserves the thanks of a grateful nation for getting Dave Grohl back on the drum throne on *Deaf*. His drum work is sumptuous and a pleasure to hear, and tops the level of an already fine Queens album to excuse the pun. Hard-rock nirvana iron cast, however, I think the best (or at least most idiosyncratic) track is the hidden "Mosquito Song," which has hardly any Groh goodness at all. That's a good thing, incidentally, since it shows that *Deaf* is more than the sum of its stult casting.

Final Score ********



Stiff Little Fingers: *Inflammable Material*

Mmmmm. Now here's a slice of punk history for you. S.L.F. is a 70s punk band from Northern Ireland, and *inflammable* is saturated with a sense of the place and the era (which, in case you're ignorant, was a firebox of Catholic versus Protestant fighting). So the songs are actually about something instead of the usual punk lashing out. Listen to "Suspect Devote" and "Alternative Jester," and you'll hear a band daring its listeners to be something more than reflexively hateful. And there's good music in the bargain. Come for the punk, stay for the message.

Final Score ********

Supernatural: *The Lost Freestyle Files*

The Lost Freestyle Files is a collection of really crappy sound recordings of Supernatural dogging other rappers during freestyle battles, interspersed with somewhat less crappy-sounding studio tracks in which Supernatural brags about how cool he is. Inasmuch as I consider freestyle rappin' to be the audio equivalent of pro wrestling, I.e., it's supposed to be live, but you can't help but wonder how much is scripted in advance, and it plays to the lowest common denominator in any event, you can imagine what I think of this.



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PlayStation®2



ANIMANIA!

Satoshi Kon's classic comes home

Millennial Fair

If you missed the theatrical release of Satoshi Kon's *Millennium Actress* (below), which would be relatively easy to do outside major urban markets, Dreamworks has your back with the new DVD release that's going on sale as you read this. The home-video version of the beautiful time-tripping love story is a little light on the extra features—there's no English voice track for the dub-prefering set—but that shouldn't stop anyone from checking out a superior film.

Space, O Frozen Sea of Stars

If you buy anything in November (since you should have bought *Millennium Actress* in October), make it *Arcadia of My Youth*, AnimEigo's DVD rerelease of the legendary Leiji Matsumoto epic. Two-and-a-half hours of classic space opera chronicle the origin of

space pirate and ultimate human Captain Harlock, with more brilliant moments than we have space to mention here.

Now Boarding Flight 005

A generation raised on the iniquitous *Dirty Pair Flash* should seek appropriate re-education from ADV's new DVD release of the classic DP OVAs and movies. The latest addition to the stack is *Flight 005 Conspiracy*, the darkest and most depressing action-mystery to ever star two bouncy secret agents in hot pants, and it'll be followed in about a month by the also excellent (and ever-so-slightly more upbeat) *Affair on Notlandia*.

Darkness Comes to Light

It's been a little while since it came and went in Japan, but *Marijan Successor Nadesico: The Prince of Darkness* is finally coming out on DVD, thanks to ADV. The movie sequel takes place four years after

the end of the mecha-comedy TV series, and it combines a little dead-serious drama with a lot of bizarre sociological humor surrounding shoujo-versus-shounen conflicts on the planet of the Gekigangeroids. Mix that with a lovely redesign of the 16-year-old Captain Hoshino Ruri and you have a fine follow-up for fans of the TV show.

What's a "Geneon," Anyway?

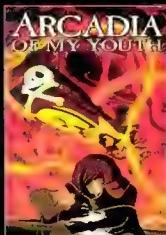
If you see "Geneon Entertainment" on some of your favorite upcoming shows—*Last Exile*, for instance—don't be confused. That's the new name for Pioneer's media publishing label, reflecting the acquisition of Pioneer LDC and Pioneer Entertainment by Japanese corporation Dentsu. You can still find its anime and soundtrack titles on the Web at [geneonanimation.com](http://www.geneonanimation.com) and [geneonmusic.com](http://www.geneonmusic.com), and Geneon's U.S. division plans to continue expanding its releases here.

Hmm! Ninjas!

The movie that introduced many fans to Japanese animation in the '90s, Yoshiaki Kawajiri's *Ninja Scroll* has been the recipient of a fine rerelease by Manga Video. The 10th-anniversary special-edition disc features a remastered widescreen cut of the film with Dolby Digital EX (5.1-channel) and DTS-ES (6.1-channel) soundtracks in both English and Japanese. It's safe to say this movie has never looked or sounded better.

Ye Not the Guilty, Whoever That Is

Followers of the series' Cartoon Network run need no encouragement, but just about anyone else should seek out the first disc of *Big O Season II* on Dec. 2. Roger the Negotiator and his art-deco Megadeus are wrecking Paradigm City for another 13 episodes on four discs. Fans of modern mecha-action shouldn't miss the show.



BAPTIZED IN
BLOOD,
A FAMILY'S
TRAGIC
DESTINY
IS BORN.



At the dawn of the second millennium, the First Belmont makes the ultimate sacrifice. And the destiny of a bloodline is decided. From the creators of Castlevania® Symphony of the Night™ and completely reinvented for its 3D debut on PlayStation® 2, Castlevania® Lament of Innocence™ reveals the true origins of the vampire-hunting Belmonts and their tireless quest for Vlad Dracula. A thousand years ago, a legend was indeed born. And the dying hasn't stopped since.



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"A gothic rock here not simply magical." - PLAY

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Castlevania
Lament of Innocence



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THE LIST

The 9 coolest things we could find this month

HOT DVD

FINDING NEMO

It was one of the best movies of the year, and it promises to be an even better DVD. This two-disc set includes a peek at the new Pixar film *The Incredibles*, virtual aquariums, making-of shorts, and the Pixar short *Knick Knack*.



OVERLOOKED GAME

GLADIUS

LucasArts stops making Star Wars games and proves that it knows what it's doing with turn-based tactical role-playing games. *Gladius* is like *Final Fantasy Tactics* in Roman times and features a huge host of creatures, including our favorites, the Mongrel Men. Check it out—you won't be disappointed.



DRINKING FROM THE ROCK GOBLET

PINK: TRY THIS CD

After dabbling with some rock stylings on her second disc, Pink, like many of her female peers, is now a full-on rock chick. What was left of the saccharine, over-produced nonsense is now gone. She's not really punk, but she's no pop princess, either.



AWESOME READ

QUICKSILVER (THE BAROQUE CYCLE VOL. 1)

We love Neal Stephenson, and if you liked the complex structure and storical cleverness of *Cryptonomicon*, you'll love this enormous first chapter in his projected trilogy about Enoch Root, who appears in *Cryptonomicon*. It's set in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, but don't let that put you off.



BEAUTIFUL HORROR

GOTHIKA

Starring two of the hottest women in the world (Halle Berry and Penelope Cruz), *Gothika* is destined for hugeness regardless of its quality when it hits theaters on November 21. Berry stars as a criminal psychologist who wakes up one day as a patient in the institution where she works (oh, the irony!), framed for a murder she has no memory of (oh, the horror!). Heard it before? Expect chills and thrills...and Robert Downey Jr.



GORGEOUS GADGETS

VIRGIN PULSE

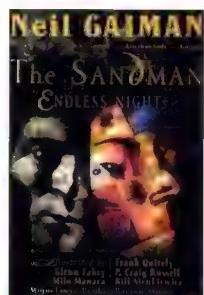
Available exclusively at Target, these gorgeous, sleek silver pieces of electron goodness are extremely reasonably priced. Check out the combined 10.4-inch LCD TV and DVD player for \$499 or the cool audio products, including clock radios, MP3 players, and personal radios. Time to start dropping hints for the holidays.



COOL PHONE

SONY ERICSSON Z600

With all the features of the Z500, plus a built-in camera and a choice of four colors, the Z600 is the latest addition to the Sony Ericsson line. Like the Z500, it's a flip phone with a full QWERTY keyboard. Look for it in Fall '01. At around \$300, it's a must have for anyone looking for a cool phone this year.



MULTIMEDIA MANGA

.hack // LEGEND OF THE TWILIGHT

It's a series of four PS2 games, two different anime shows, and a manga series, and it's arguably one of the most ambitious multimedia projects ever made. Each piece helps tell the greater story of *The World of .hack*, and the manga, recently released by Tokyopop, is a vital part. Buy it now...it even reads backwards, just like the Japanese books. Plus, it's really darn funny, and it's got a great visual style.

RETURN OF THE KING

SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS

After closing the door on the Sandman years ago, Neil Gaiman returns with seven new stories for each of the Endless: Death, Desire, Delirium, Dream, Despair, Destruction, and Destiny illustrated by seven different artists, including Dave McKean (*Aarkham Asylum*, *Mr. Punch*) and Glenn Fabry (*Slaine*, *Preacher*, *Hellblazer*). If you buy only one graphic novel this year, make it this one.

p.o.d.



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Plus! ~ 50 minute feature "Inside P.O.D. Culture"
- 1 of 3 Limited Edition Art Cards inside
(A select few have been signed by the band)



BY THE NUMBERS

PS2 Top 20 Sales

Ninjas get all the credit, but what about the other guys? Like the ones who built the pyramids or the ones who rode horses and other neat stuff. Let's give props to the samurai, okay?



Scooter and Giancarlo both went to UC Berkeley, where the "NFL home team" is the Oakland Raiders. Scooter still roots for Oaktown, but Giancarlo's team of choice is now the Chicago Bears.

Title/Publisher	Rating
Madden NFL 2004 (EA Sports)	★★★★★
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 (EA Sports)	★★★★★
Soul Calibur II (Namco)	★★★★★
ESPN NFL Football (Sega)	★★★★★
NASCAR Thunder 2004 (EA Sports)	★★★★★
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness (Atlas)	★★★★★
NHL 2004 (EA Sports)	★★★★★
Simpsons Hit & Run (Wendi Universal)	★★★★★
SOCOM (game only) (Sony CEA)	★★★★★
ESPN NHL Hockey (Square Enix U.S.A.)	★★★★★
.hack//OUTBREAK (Bandai)	★★★★★
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Rockstar)	★★★★★
NCAA Football 2004 (EA Sports)	★★★★★
Final Fantasy X (Square Enix U.S.A.)	★★★★★
DORMAX 2 (Konami)	★★★★★
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season (Activision)	★★★★★
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution (Sega)	★★★★★
Silent Hill 3 (Konami)	★★★★★
Tekken 4 (Namco)	★★★★★
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin (Eidos)	★★★★★



Soul Calibur II



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004



Disgaea: Hour of Darkness



.hack//OUTBREAK

PS1 Top 10 Sales



1 FF Tactics	Square
2 InvuYasha	Bandai
3 Bayblade	Crave
4 Madden NFL 2004	EA
5 Final Fantasy Origins	Square
6 Namco Museum Vol. 3	Namco
7 DBZ: Ut! Battle 22	Atari
8 Shrek Treasure Hunt	TDK
9 DDR Kanamix	Konami
10 Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom

Japan's Top 10 PS2 Games

1 Dynasty Warriors 4 XL	Koei
2 Grand Theft Auto III	Capcom
3 Tennis no Oji-Sama 2	Konami
4 Sunrise World War	Bandai
5 Gundam: Enc In Space	Bandai
6 Drakengard	Square Enix
7 Winning Eleven 7	Konami
8 Best Play Pro Baseball	Enterbrain
9 Gekido Pro Baseball	Sega
10 Dynasty Warriors 4 PP	Koei



1 Madden NFL 2004 (PS2)	EA
2 Simpsons Hit & Run (PS2)	V.G.
3 Soul Calibur II (PS2)	Namco
4 Tiger Woods 2004 (PS2)	EA
5 Soul Calibur II (GC)	Namco
6 NCAA Football 2004 (PS2)	EA
7 Soul Calibur II (XB)	Namco
8 Midnight Club II (PS2)	Rockstar
9 Madden NFL 2004 (XB)	EA
10 Simpsons Hit & Run (XB)	VUG

Top 10 Sales, All Systems

1 FF Tactics Adv. (IGBA)	Square Enix
2 Madden NFL 2004 (PS2)	EA
3 ESPN Football (XB)	Sega
4 Tiger Woods 2004 (PS2)	EA
5 Soul Calibur II (GC)	Namco
6 Soul Calibur II (PS2)	Namco
7 SW Jedi Academy (PC)	LucasArts
8 WWE Raw 2 (XB)	THQ
9 ESPN Football (PS2)	Sega
10 Soul Calibur II (XB)	Namco

Trend Spotter: Ninjas

Ninjas rock. Stormshadow (from *G.I. Joe*) once said, "A ninja does not use weapons. A ninja is a weapon!" Then he punched a tank that promptly fell apart. Now, ninjas are all over the place on PS2.



Work up the scrrila!

Dang, this is an expensive month to be a PS2 gamer! It sucks to be poor!

63

NUMBER OF PS2 GAMES
SHIPPING IN NOVEMBER 2003



\$2,519.37

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OF THOSE GAMES

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TO DO THAT



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TOTAL AMOUNT YOU'D SPEND IF
YOU ONLY BOUGHT GAMES WE
RECOMMEND THIS MONTH

Source: EB. Numbers reflect the sales at EB and affiliated outlets, and don't include other retail outlets. That's probably why you never see Deer Hunter crack the top 10—sales for the top 10 and the rest of ninjas come from other sources. Game descriptions written by the SPIN staff.

SOURCE: US AND A CALCULATOR

YOU GOT NOTHING, IVERSON.

Seriously, I can take you. With the IsoMotion feature, I can clear the court and take you one-on-one. My crossover will leave you flat. My defense will leave you helpless. You can't stop me. I'm ballin' 24/7, crushing legends better than you. Let's go, Answer, step up.



PlayStation 2



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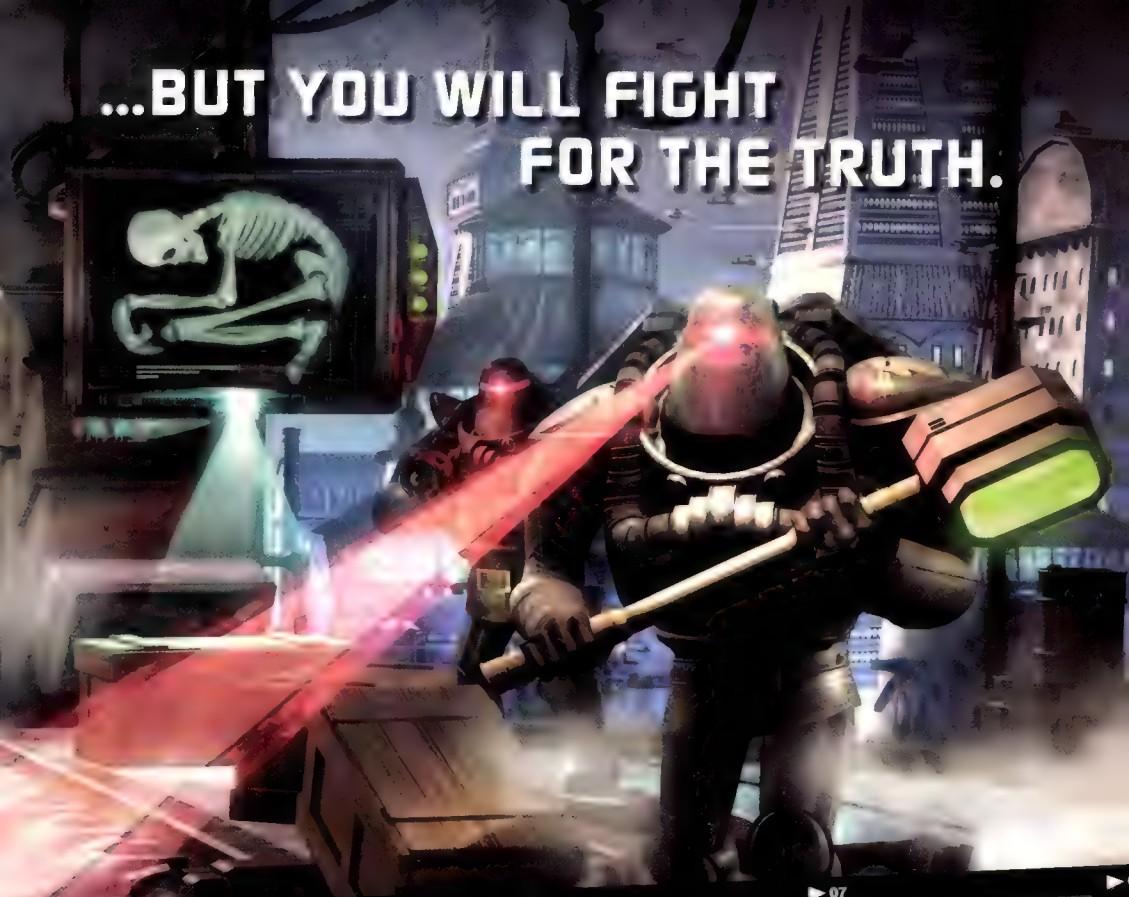
Violence
Comic Mischief



PlayStation 2



...BUT YOU WILL FIGHT FOR THE TRUTH.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL EXPOSE THE CONSPIRACY

There's only one way to blow the lid off a government conspiracy: expose the lies. And no one can do it better than Jade, an Action Reporter with an eye for the truth and the heart of a hero. See beyond the propaganda. Discover the secrets of a broken world. Fight to save your people from an Alien threat. But above all, believe in nothing - except yourself.



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EVERYONE

**Comic Mischief
Violence**

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PlayStation.2



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Avalanches. Trees. Competitors. Ravines. Nightmares. Blizzards. The Mountain. All after you.**

PREVIEWS

Gabe
Logan's
favorite
section.

GABE LOGAN

He's not you this time
In *The Omega Strain* you're an operative for the Agency working under Gabe Logan. He's your boss.

THIS ISSUE

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- Star Wars: Tomorrow's War
- Star Wars: Armada

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain
Sony Computer Entertainment America

SYPHON FILTER THE OMEGA STRAIN

Infecting us with innovative online play

With the last three games having sold about a billion units between them IDK, closer to 3 million, it's no surprise that *Syphon Filter* is making the leap to PlayStation 2. The most fascinating feature is the unique cooperative gameplay. Up to four players can team up online in nine of the 17 levels you'd play by yourself offline—in fact, you can actually add players to your single-player campaign on the fly. There's a real benefit to having extra help, too. Certain areas are accessible only when two or more players team up—one teammate offers another a boost to a high ledge, for example. You can access some secrets [like weapon upgrades] in this manner—they'll help personalize your in-game character.

Publisher: Sony LA Developer: Rayark Release Date: Feb. 10





110
VROOM!
How can you move
without your vehicle?



112
ZOOM!
Sonic speeds over to PS2!
Check out *Sonic Heroes*.



114
SWISH!
Kung-fu kicks and more,
the Army of Zin is here!



SYPHON WHAT?

Who got filtered? So just what the hell does "Syphon Filter" mean? Well, nothing really. It's a code name for a biogenetically-fatal virus that can target specific demographics. The Omega team here is a particular variety of the Syphon Filter virus. Got it?



SPEAK UP

Put that USB headset to use. Just like SOCOM, *The Omega Strain* allows you to chat with others online with the USB headset.



FULL ARSENAL

More than a few weapons available. Sony promises more than 100 weapons that can amass throughout the course of the game.

Hand Scanner





ALIAS

We love the alternative to radar presented in the stealthy moments of *Alias*. When Sydney tries to pick a lock, the screen splits and shows her working away in one view, while the other screen reveals an incoming guard. This adds an interesting level of visual tension to traditional stealth puzzles. Even better, Sydney (voiced by Jennifer Garner) gets to wear the same hot costumes you see on the show.

Publisher: Acclaim **Developer:** Acclaim Studios Cheltenham **Release Date:** December



MEDAL OF HONOR RISING SUN

A total World War II experience

Actually playing the Pearl Harbor sequence—as opposed to watching it—reconfirms something we've always felt. *Rising Sun* is less of a game and more of an experience. Even without a 5.1 speaker setup and a huge screen, the chaotic crashes of all the Zeros, their bombs, gunfire, and the crazy motion blurring and camera shaking make for an extremely immersive experience. Missions in the Pacific Theater are more challenging, since many of them take place in the jungle. So not only do you have to deal with swaying grass and hills that can easily hide troops, but you also have smarter soldiers to fight against. Camouflaged Japanese troops are craftier (they even pop outta secret holes) and are not afraid to charge and bayonet you.

Publisher: EA Games **Developer:** EA Los Angeles **Release Date:** December



HANDS ON



DAY OF INFAMY

Taking in the sights and sounds

It might play like a mere rail shooter, but the overall package astounds us.



ONWARD HO!

Band of brothers

Many of the missions involve you and a whole buncha other soldiers. Since you're already taking on the Imperial Army with an AI buddy, you might as well load up the co-op mode and play with a real friend. Or you can just play against him in deathmatch online.



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE—OPERATION SURMA

Want to pilot a tiny, mechanical, insectile spy device armed with a camera and a bomb? Want to swing from the rafters on a super-strong grappling line? Want to swap faces as frequently as most people change their socks? If so, *Operation Surma* is for you. It may not be as true to life as the *Tom Clancy* games, but *Splinter Cell* fans will definitely find plenty to like in *Surma*'s stealth-based gameplay.

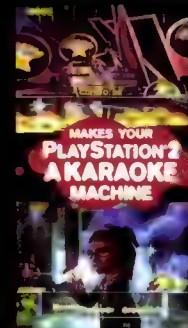
Publisher: Atari **Developer:** Paradigm **Release Date:** December

THE THRILL OF SINGING
MEETS THE AGONY OF DEFEAT.

Karaoke Revolution

When it comes to singing, you may already be a winner. Find out with the first karaoke video game that actually judges your vocal talents. Karaoke Revolution™ turns you into a star and your PlayStation®2 into an interactive karaoke machine, complete with scoring, training and a built-in audience.

Sing along with 35 hit songs, including chart-toppers popularized by Michelle Branch, R.E.M., Avril Lavigne, Nickelback, Barenaked Ladies and more. It's the ultimate party game with multiplayer for up to 8 of your friends, so step up to the mic and discover how well you carry a tune. And just how much fun agony can be.



EVERYONE



Visit www.esrb.org
for more ratings
information



PlayStation 2

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GET TO KNOW JAK...



Mild Violence
Comic Mischief
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes



PlayStation.2

NAUGHTY DOG

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PREVIEWS

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

Work alone—with the help of others

You are Sam Fisher. You are a splinter cell. You operate at the highest levels of secrecy. You play well with others?

It sounds wrong, somehow, but teamwork plays a role in the sequel to the game of stealth espionage that rocked our world earlier this year. Although the single-player, lone-wolf campaign remains *Pandora Tomorrow's* main focus, the addition of online play allows multiple players to operate together in the day-after-tomorrow Clancyverse. Details remain sketchy; we're not sure how many simultaneous players the game supports, nor whether you can play through the main game with the help of others (as in *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*). We do know, however, that having other people creeping around with you adds a whole new dimension to the game. And, of course, the differences in the single-player game—most notably the lush, tropical environments you see here—will undoubtedly make *Pandora Tomorrow* a vastly different game from the original.

Publisher: Ubi soft Developer: Ubisoft Release Date: 11/11



STEAM HEAT

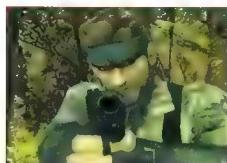
Head for the tropics

The new jungle settings for portions of *Pandora Tomorrow* offer more places to hide—for you and your enemies.



500

Approximate population of the endangered American crocodile in North America. Conversely, our continent features around 1.5 million alligators.

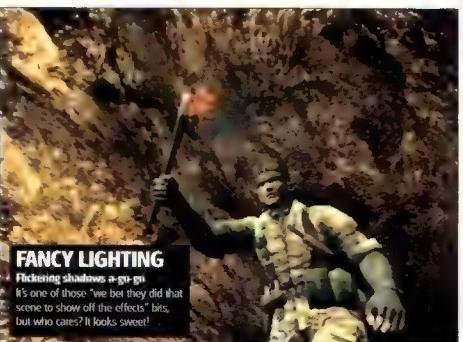


METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SNAKE EATER

Snakes never tasted so good

There's not much in the way of new tidbits on *Snake Eater*, but we do have aasty batch of new screenshots fresh from both the Tokyo Game Show and London's EGX. Looks pretty sweet, huh? Well, there's still a lot of writing

Publisher: Konami Developer: Konami Release Date: November 2004



...LIKE WE KNOW JAK



In a vast world,
we'll be your guide.

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YOU'RE A REALLY SICK BASTARD IF...
...you find *Manhunt* funnier than episode 86 of *Gilligan's Island*, also based on "The Most Dangerous Game."



LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFINANCE

Among the *Legacy of Kain* series' best features has always been the way each game reimagines the world of Nosgoth. *Defiance* is no exception, offering yet another interpretation of the events from the previous games. You'll encounter plenty of familiar faces—Moebius, Vorador, The Elder God, and even Janos Audron (you know, the blue dude with wings) are all expected to make appearances.

Publisher: Eidos **Developer:** Crystal Dynamics **Release Date:** December



TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.

As you may have guessed from his rude interruption of last month's *True Crime* conversation, Snoop Dogg has indeed recorded an original song for Activision's attempt at the *Grand Theft Auto* formula. The soundtrack features a who's who of West Coast rap, from Westside Connection to Young Billionaires—more than 50 brand-new tracks. If you're into rap, that's a big deal. If not, well...don't those environments look lovely?

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Luxor **Release Date:** November



MANHUNT



A most dangerous game

If there's any doubt in your mind that *Manhunt* will be one of the most violent games ever made, just wait till you see the downright squirm-inducing Levels of Execution feature. After holding down Square, three arrows lock on to your victim. The length of time you hold down the button yields one of three execution styles: hasty, violent, or extreme—“extreme” as in using a glass shard to stab your adversary in the stomach multiple times, followed by several seconds of eye gouging. Yikes. Wanna go extreme with a baseball bat? Prepare for some decapitation.

Manhunt controls very smoothly, with Square or X as your main attacks (they both perform the same executions in stealth mode, but you'll see different attacks in melee), Triangle to prop up against a wall, and Circle to fiddle with your inventory. Even with easy controls, the game still makes us a little sick to our stomachs. In a good way?

Publisher: Rockstar **Developer:** Rockstar North **Release Date:** November



FACES OF DEATH

Snuff film 101

Various cameras bring about lurid viewing angles and blood splatters.



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the Ninjas from the boys.



Animated Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2



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IN MY QUEST
FOR REDEMPTION

NOT EVEN MY
DEATH

I COMMAND THE FORCES OF TIME.
DECEIVED BY A TREACHEROUS VIZIER, I WAS LED TO UNLEASH THE DARK
POWERS OF THE SANDS OF TIME UPON THE SULTAN'S KINGDOM. NOW, AS
DARKNESS CONSUMES ALL IN ITS PATH, MY SPEED, AGILITY, AND SKILL AS A
WARRIOR ARE NOT ENOUGH. I MUST LEARN TO COMMAND THE SANDS TO SLOW,
FREEZE, ACCELERATE, AND EVEN REVERSE TIME ITSELF. IF I FAIL TO UNDO MY FATAL
MISTAKE, ALL SHALL PERISH WITH ME. MINE IS A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL. NOT GLORY.



Blood
Violence
Suggestive Themes

PC
CD-ROM
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Playstation 2

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UBISOFT



THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2000 & 2001

Few companies would see it as good marketing to release a game at the end of 2003 that references the years 2000 and 2001 in its title. But SNK knows its fans wouldn't have it any other way. Encompassing two *King of Fighters* games, this compilation offers a ton of classic 2D-fighting action. Highlights include the series' first 3D backgrounds in 2001, and a mode in 2000 that rewards you with footage from old *King* games.

Publisher: SNK NeoGeo USA Developer: SNK Release Date: November



DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 2

We've played this game, and we still don't know who the fuck is Piccolo, or why they fight. Our lack of DBZ knowledge aside, *Budokai 2* looks like a very solid fighter. Our favorite feature (besides *fusion fighters* into one!) is the destructible environment. You can throw someone into a mountain and watch it crumble on him. It makes the fights that much more epic and over-the-top.

Publisher: Namco Developer: Dimps Release Date: December



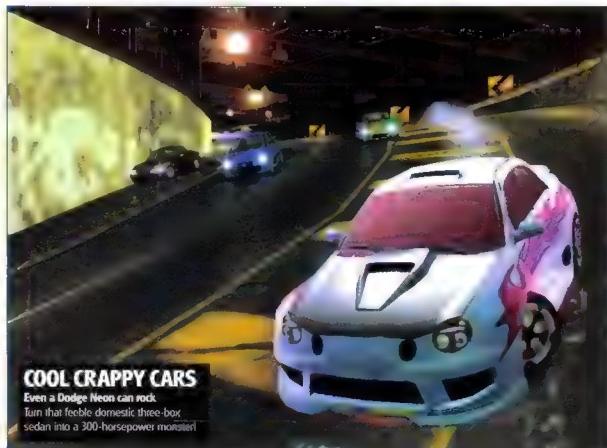
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

HANDS ON

Insert fast, furious reference here

There's a lot to get excited about with *Need for Speed Underground*, and we're not saying that because it graced our cover a few months ago. It's not just that this is the most comprehensive PS2 simulation of the import tuning scene, nor that the graphics are gorgeous and produced with the help of an Oscar-nominated special-effects wiz. It's not just that it boasts every significant aftermarket parts manufacturer and every licensed vehicle you'd want to see in a game. It's not just that you can race online and even compete against players running the PC version of *Underground*. It's all this with a cool attitude (the *Need for Speed* franchise loosens up nicely), great tunes, and controls to die for. Stay tuned for our review next month... if you can wait that long.

Publisher: Atria/Neon Developer: Atria Box Release Date: November



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PlayStation 2



ATARI

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 2
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA
Release Date: November 12

Current frontrunner for
Least Asked For Sequel of the Year, *Ford Racing 2*
at least seems like a
decent racer, including
over the decades.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 2
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA
Release Date: November 12

You know you've always
wanted to slip into a Cal-
Man, or Tatra semi truck
as a guy with a name like
Harri Luostarinen, Gerd

Well, now you can.

WINNING ELEVEN 7

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami CE Tokyo
Release Date: February

best soccer game ever
graphics, more teams
(now nearly 100), and
six new stadiums... too
bad it won't be online.

ESPN COLLEGE HOOPS

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Rush Games/W.
Release Date: November

Sega's ESPN-ification of
sports titles continues
with this fine game of
NCAA b-ball. *Hoops* adds
a solid dose of school
spirit to an enhanced
NBA 2K2 engine.

NCAA FINAL FOUR 2004

Publisher: Sony LCE
Developer: 989 Sports
Release Date: November
989 has totally redone the
Final Four graphics engine

and added a host of other
improvements, including
great online mode rounds.
Put the package.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 2
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA
Release Date: November 12

Play Dynasty mode for 30
seasons as your favorite
of more than 300 schools
(150 more than 2003), and
hear Dick Vitale call
every single game.



GRAN TURISMO 4

It's time to get really old school

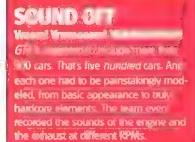
When we heard that *Gran Turismo 4* would focus on the history of the automobile, we joked that we'd end up racing Ford Model Ts around modern courses. So, imagine our surprise at GT creator Kazunori Yamauchi's comments on what GT4's oldest car would be. Our intention is to represent the entire history of cars, so we hope to include the first cars ever made. This is just one example of the neat features that might... might... make it into the final game. Yamauchi confesses a desire to include some fantasy rides, for example, from autos that he des gneé (somewhat likely) to hidden cars from *Motor Toon GP*. Polyphony's cartoonish PS1 racing game (less likely). There is also talk of circumventing the no damage restriction by showing vehicles driving off cliffs (on the Grand Canyon track, for example), but not actually suffering damage. Right now, this is all just talk; expect more concrete info soon.

Publisher: Sony LCE Developer: Polyphony Digital Release Date: TBA at some point

TIGHT!

Prepare to nos in close quarters

The new, more responsive physics engine
in GT4 allows for much narrower courses.



DRIVE LIKE CRAZY

A major game remains a minor controller

Since Polyphony went back to the drawing board to revamp the GT physics engine, it asked Logitech to design a more realistic Driving Force wheel. Enter the Driving Force Pro, with a full 900 degrees of rotation (same as your car) and a stick shift. It rocks.



FREEDOM WILL ENDURE



CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II

BACK TO BAGHDAD

IN STORES NOW



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THE US DELTA FORCE OR BRITISH SAS,
EACH WITH UNIQUE SKILLS AND ARSENALS.



MULTIPLAYER ACTION ALLOWS UP TO FOUR
PLAYERS TO JOIN IN THE BATTLE FOR FREEDOM!



TEN VARIED LEVELS OF GULF WAR
ACTION WILL TAKE YOU FROM STEALTHY
P.O.W. BREAKOUTS TO ALL OUT TANK BATTLES!



PlayStation.2



Violence
Blood

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VIRTUAL ON: MERCs

Fans of Sega's giant-robot fighting-game series will notice some interesting new features in *Virtual On: Mercs*. The game not only offers more virtuaroids waging battle at a single time (usually two or three), but it also has a full Story mode that sheds some light on the conflict between the robot clans. There's even a Challenge mode, if you feel like testing your *Virtual On* skills in different situations.

Publisher: Sega Developer: Konami Release Date: Fall



X-TYPE FINAL

The old-school *R-T* with its best graphics ever. The various alien weirdies and their weapons serve as great eye candy, but the biggest feature has to be the 102 ships! You begin with a choice of a puny three, each with

plenty of new rides starts to fill your hangar.

Publisher: Eidos Developer: KEM Release Date: January

SONIC HEROES

Team up with Sega's blue boy

It's about freakin' time, huh? After nearly two years of developing games for other companies' systems, Sega is finally releasing a *Sonic* title on PS2. But *Sonic Heroes* isn't your typical platformer.

For this game, Yuji Naka and Sega Team have given the franchise its biggest face-lift since the first *Sonic Adventure* on Dreamcast. The series trademark lightning-quick gameplay returns, and this time includes a new teamwork element. Choose from five three-critter squads, each embarks on its own 14-level adventure en route to thwarting Dr. Eggman and his nefarious Metal Sonic. You literally control the whole team yourself, switching between characters on the fly. For instance, an obstacle confronting Team Sonic might require Knuckles' raw power to pass, then, another situation might require Tails ability to fly or Sonic's blazing speed. Fun stuff!

Publisher: SEGA Developer: SEGA Team Release Date: January



UP, UP, AND AWAY!

Tails takes off!
When a big gap comes along, call upon the huffball who can fly to help you progress through the level.



WHO'S YOUR TEAM?

You've got the chance from Team Sonic: Sonic, Knuckles, Tails Team Chaotix: Espio the Chameleon, Vector the Crocodile, Chamy the Bee Team Rose: Amy Rose, Big the Cat, Cream Team Radical: Spinie, Bunnie, Iguana

from conception to reality

"GBA eat your heart out."
Official XBOX Magazine July, 2003

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PREVIEWS

Maximo. Just like Frogger.

LEADERSHIP Annual poll of our readers
gubernatorial candidate to star in a game:
Gary Coleman is in the awful *Posta 2* (PG)

MONSTER HUNTER: SPAWN'S DEMONIC DILEMMA

Here, you see Spawn snatching up a demon with his chains. You don't see him spilling its guts everywhere a second later. Would you expect anything less?

TERMINATOR 2: RISE OF THE MACHINES

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Black Ops
Release Date: November
Adapting the movie it's named for to first-person-shooter form, T2 is the first game ever to feature Arnold's likeness and voice.



FROGGER'S ADVENTURES: THE RESCUE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami CE Hawaii
Release Date: November
Konami takes the original green gaming icon back to his routes with a hop-o-riffic game for the young uns. Four can play in multiplayer.



LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Warner
Release Date: November
switch between both Bugs and Daffy in a game that keeps in mind much of what makes the characters so popular. Crossdressing included.



WIMPFLASH

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Release Date: November
We've played it. We like it. We want more of that crazy weasel Spanx and the bunny Redmond. Whom Spanx rails around as a weapon. We review it next month.



HEAVY METAL

That's the Army of Zin for you. Most of the enemies Maximo fights are robots powered from within by a glowing lifeorce.

HANDS ON

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN

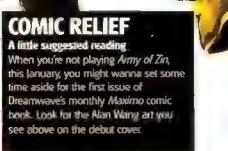
Keeping the good, fixing the bad

You might remember our mixed feelings about *Maximo Ghosts to Glory*. On one hand, you had a great character starring in a beautiful game with solid 3D action; on the other, you had insane difficulty in which only the most hardcore of hardcore gamers finds any pleasure. For *Army of Zin*, expect everything you liked about the original to remain as solid as ever. The heroic act of saving townsfolk has been implemented, along with several new moves. Capcom has also done its best to keep things challenging, though not nearly as frustratingly hard as the previous game. You won't fall to your death nearly as often, for instance. You also get to keep everything you buy for the duration of the game. And yes, this includes specially powered boxers.

Publisher: Capcom Developer: Capcom Release Date: November



Maxie hangs in there with this new move, designed to make the game less frustrating.



**REALITY
SOUNDS
BORING.**

A close-up photograph of a Butterfinger candy bar, showing the layered structure of the nougat, caramel, and chocolate coating.

THE ORDINARY

**EVERYONE
E** **NHL HITZ PRO**

These codes are entered on the Select Teams screen. Press the button beside the USER prompt on your choose sides controller option, and use your controller to enter one of the following user names to unlock visual cheats:

herk: (Player Head Mode) You can make the head size big or small.

ingy: (Team Head Mode) You can make the entire team's heads big or small.

211s: (Puck Size)
You can make the puck size big or small.

sasg: (Puck Shadow)
You can choose to put a shadow around the puck to make it more visible in the game.

carb: (Puck Glow)
Every time you hit the puck, the puck will have a glowing trail mark on the end of it.



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

If you ever long to enter the world of urban street racing and all its grit and glory, then the latest title in the Need for Speed series: Need for Speed Underground is just what you call for. Take on today's most popular tuner cars as you build the ultimate street machine by earning cash to pay for custom body kits and a host of car performance mods.

A number of diverse events set in rough, wet and sometimes nighttime settings make up the heart of street competition. You become a complete street racer only by perfecting skills in each event by means of nailing the perfect shift in drag racing and by putting your street cred on the line, racing through the city streets at all hours of the night.

Prove you belong in the elite street racing circles, work your way up the underground rankings and take on the best of the best in each discipline.



WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED

[Unlock More Boards](#)

At the main menu press Up, Up, Left, Left, Right, Right, Down, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down. The game will say "You got all the boards... Or did you?"

Clear All Gaps

At the main menu press R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2
R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2. The game will say
"Wakeboarding Royalty."

Unlock All Levels

At the main menu press Square (4), Circle (4), Triangle (4), Square, Circle, Triangle. The game will say "Travel Visa Approved."

DARE TO LOG ON TO BUTTERFINGER.COM

Can you quickly type the word *Growlanser* without spelling it "Growlancer" or "Growlanser"? It's tough!



FINAL FANTASY XI

This month's *Final Fantasy XI* topic: transportation. As in previous *FF* games, you get the ability to range farther afield only with experience. In *FFXI*, you gain access to chocobos at level 20; once you earn a chocobo license, you can travel much faster, and enemies ignore you while you ride. Other transports include ferries and the inevitable airship—which you can use only at very high levels.

Publisher: Sony CEA Developer: Square Enix USA Release Date: March



GOBLIN COMMANDER: UNLEASH THE HORDE

Emphasizing tactics over economy (and silly name over good name), *Goblin Commander* is a real-time strategy that lets players focus on...well, goblin commanding land conquering. You directly control units and lead the charge using character classes like the massive Titan (the *OPM* favorite), or order their minions to lead it for you.

Publisher: Jaleco Developer: Jaleco Release Date: December

GROWLANSER GENERATIONS

HANDS ON

Working Designs 'ansers the call'

Working Designs may not have published anything in ages, but this upcoming collection of *Growlanser II* and *III* makes a strong bid to move the company back up the RPG heap. These are some fine strategy games that might never have seen the light of day outside Japan, if not for WD. If nothing else, the *Growlanser* games are novel's imply for their strategy-style gameplay without the use of isometric grids. You can move wherever you want on the batt field while keeping an eye on the relative position of friends and foes through a radar in the upper right. Other cool touches include the ability to define the hero's personality through dialogue options, full screen character portraits, and dynamic event-filled encounters.

Publisher: Rockstar Games Developer: Tengai Soft Release Date: Early 2004



A LITTLE DATED

Feel free to laugh at the graphics. Even by 2001 standards, when *Growlanser II* was originally released in Japan, the game's graphics pretty much sucked. But what it lacks in looks, it makes up for in gameplay.



THE DYNAMICS OF AN ENCOUNTER

Strategy on instant levels

Battles in the *Growlanser* games always seem straightforward at first, but they tend to go awry before too long. Here (left), easily in *Growlanser II* when you enter a skin to investigate a recent monster infestation when a couple of hags confront you. But that's before this guy starts closing the walls in—and right after that (right), one of your inept admirers comes onto the scene—so you've gotta escort him to safety while you're racing the clock to escape the narrowing corridor. And this is one of *Growlanser*'s simpler situations!



IF YOU LIKE THIS AND ANIME...

Try *Noir*, a stylized series starring two young fencers. It was created by some of the same team behind *.hack*.



ROSY OUTLOOK

Blackrose can be a handful
But her heart is in the right place, as she helps Kite unravel the mysteries surrounding the World.



.hack//QUARANTINE

Time to save The World

Fans have devoted months of time to the *.hack* phenomenon, and the four-part simulated massively multiplayer online RPG which, as you likely already know, is neither massively multiplayer nor online is soon to conclude. So what's new with *Quarantine*? Not a whole lot—it's basically more of the same stuff you've grown to love over the past three installments, kicked up to the highest, and most challenging level yet. That means you'll have to employ a wide range of advanced combat strategies, both for yourself and your party members. Be sure to take advantage of the new weaponry and new character functions, both of which will be essential for survival. It's gonna get rough, but that's what it takes to save the world—both offline and online.

So, what do you while you're waiting for this February release? Have you tried raising all the grunty types? Or winning all the grunty races? Exploring all the hidden dungeons? Have you run into all the character cameos from the *.hack* anime? In any case, don't forget to keep your save files from part 3 so you're prepared for the mayhem that'll ensue.

Publisher: Bandai Developer: CyberConnect2 Release Date: Feb. 12



✓ LANCER



✓ LAVA GUN



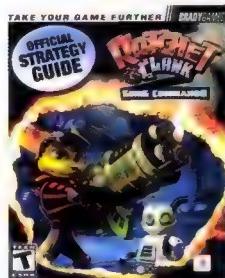
✓ PLASMA STORM



✓ GRAVITY BOMB



✓ RYNO III



✓ YOUR ULTIMATE WEAPON

Official Strategy Guide from BradyGames



Mild Violence



PlayStation.2



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One of last year's most popular books, *The War and Peace of a Country Boy*, has now been published in a new edition.



MEGATRON!

Lookin' pretty badass, huh?
As menacing as Megatron might look,
we've told an even bigger nemesis
awaits. Now, who could that be...?

TRANSFORMERS ARMADA PRELUDE TO ENERGON

We like what meets our eye

We take what needs our eye
All we know the Transformers are more than meets the eye—if the Transformers game fits that description as we've seen, then we're in for a big treat with *Prelude to Energon*. Just look at these shots! Sure, the game is based on the new *Armada* style (Minicon enhancements and all), but Melbourne House assures us the abysmal Cartoon Network TV show is just a starting point. Optimus and the boys have much more in common with the Dreamwave comic series. Play as three different Autobots and transform whenever you feel like it en route to thwarting the Decepticons.

Publisher: Ata! Developer: Melbourne House Release Date: Spring



第六章

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BRA & PANTY MATCH, HELL YEAH.



PlayStation®2





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Violence



PlayStation.2



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AND FOR ALL I KNOW...



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FINAL FANTASY X-2



Yuna



Rikku



Paine

girls just wanna have **FUN**

SHORTLY after the *Final Fantasy X* demo at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, I was asked if I wanted to play the game again. I said yes, and the host responded, "Good! You're gonna have fun!" I was a bit taken aback by the comment, but I appreciated the enthusiasm. It's not every day you get to play a game that's been described as "revolutionary" and "the best RPG ever made." And it's not every day you get to play a game that's been described as "revolutionary" and "the best RPG ever made."

But I'm not a doctor, so I took a deep breath and tried to ignore the comment. I started herding my team members into a sphere—one that seemed to shrink as we got closer. "I do not care about fun," I said, "I care about winning."

Meanwhile, in the Eternal Garden, Yuna, Tidus, and the rest of the crew were fighting off the last remnants of the Sin. Some of their party members had already become the living embodiment of the "fun" they'd been promised. Tidus, for example, had turned into a giant, spiky, yellow blob. He was still fighting, but he was fighting like a blob. He was fighting like a blob.

King Faroh X, the King of the Drifters, equal to strength in his own right, had just left without having a chance to speak with his three female bodyguards. "I need to talk to you," he said. "I need to talk to you about something that's very different to the rest of the game. I'm going to make a new world, and part of it will feature the things you see over there." The audience cheered.

"I've actually never been to another world before," the moderator said, "so that's all I can possibly expect from the King of the Drifters."

The King of the Drifters' words hung heavy. The spectators began to applaud him on behalf of the other characters that were in the room. "What's a world?" asked Yuna. "What's a world?" asked Tidus. "What's a world?" asked the others.

"Well, I'm not going to tell you," said the King of the Drifters. "It's a secret. No problem, but just don't expect to get to go swimming there."

As the crowd applauded, I had to have those questions answered. This might be the first *Final Fantasy*, but it's actually pretty fun. And you beat it.

At that point, I realized that new hardware systems didn't mean that things changed. Instead, *Final Fantasy X* was much more than a technical wuvre. It was a whole new kind of fantasy.

by Gary Steinman

FINAL FANTASY X-2

BABY one more time

It was the game that was never meant to be. For 15 years, every *Final Fantasy* had been a completely separate experience, with discrete stories, different characters, and unique settings. Sure, there were common elements, along with a fairly consistent if undefinable feel—but other than those two special words in the title, each game was different from the last.

It was time for a change.

But why now? Simple, economics. With development costs running in the multimillions, it didn't make sense to start fresh with every *Final Fantasy*. "It was a little too much to all of a sudden toss aside all the assets we created to work on the next *Final Fantasy*," says Producer Yoshinori Kitase. "We wanted to find a way to reuse some of the assets from the original, but add a little variation here and there. The goal was to maintain something that's similar in feel but also completely different so that it came out as if it were a different team that handled this title."

When we first heard about this sequel over a year ago, we naturally assumed it would share the same battle system, the same characters, the same structure—the same everything. But Director Motomu Toriyama is quick to claim that was never Square's intention. We knew from the very beginning that if we were going to do a sequel, it would have to be a drastic change, as much as possible within the boundaries that were set by the original story and world, he says. Being that it was the first direct sequel in our flagship *Final Fantasy* series, we didn't want it to be just another sequel. We needed to make a big impact.

Rather than sticking with any formula established in *Final Fantasy X*, Kitase and his team rebuilt the entire game, creating an experience that's not only different from its predecessor but also altogether unique, compared with any previous *Final Fantasy*. The combat is a fast and furious new take on the classic Active Time Battle system. The story is told through nonlinear, choose-your-own-adventure-style missions. The elaborate summons, a *Final Fantasy* sacred cow, have been replaced with a system of spectacular costume changes that alter your stats and abilities on the fly. There's a new action element that lets you jump and cumber around certain areas. But the biggest change has got to be the tone: It's light, it's goofy, it's...funny!

With Yuna no longer a summoner, she could be more free-spirited and cheerful," Toriyama notes. "She's no longer carrying all that weight from the original story, so it was just a natural move to make the sequel brighter and more lighthearted."



MY, HOW YOU'VE GROWN!

Yuna's growth is reflected in her character's evolution. She's still the kindhearted summoner who wants to help everyone, but she's more confident in her abilities. She's also more independent, having to rely less on her friends for support. Her relationship with Tidus has changed, and she's more attracted to him. Rikku is still the playful, carefree character she always was, but she's more matured and has developed a deeper appreciation for the world around her. Tidus has become more protective of Yuna and is more willing to stand up for her. The three of them are still a close-knit group, but they've grown individually as well.



EXTERNAL CALM

With the world in shambles, the characters must learn to deal with their emotions. Yuna tries to stay positive and focused, while Rikku finds ways to distract herself from the chaos. Tidus, however, is struggling with his own demons and feels like he's failing his friends. The game explores how each character deals with the pressure of saving the world and the toll it takes on them.



THE LOVE BOAT

As the characters travel across the world, they encounter various challenges and obstacles. One of the most memorable scenes is when they are forced to travel on a boat during a storm. The boat is摇摇晃晃 (rocking) and the characters are trying to stay dry and safe. This scene serves as a metaphor for the instability of the world and the uncertainty of the future.



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GAME BOY ADVANCE

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• Stuffed Bunny

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NOVEMBER 2003



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FINAL FANTASY X-2

get the
PARTY
started

From the moment you start playing *FFX-2*, you'll notice how very different it is

Just by watching the opening movie, you'll see how Yuna has changed," says Scenario Writer Kazuhige Nojima. "The setting, a concert at the Luca stadium, starring High Summoner Yuna. The song one of those peppy J-pop affairs, complete with jaunty male dancers cavorting in the background. Meanwhile, Rikku and Paine are lurking around the stadium, fighting off enemies as they make their way to center stage for a confrontation with Lady Yuna...or is that really her?

'Once you start playing the game, you might not really feel the change,' Nojima adds, 'but we want you to at least notice the differences right from the start.'

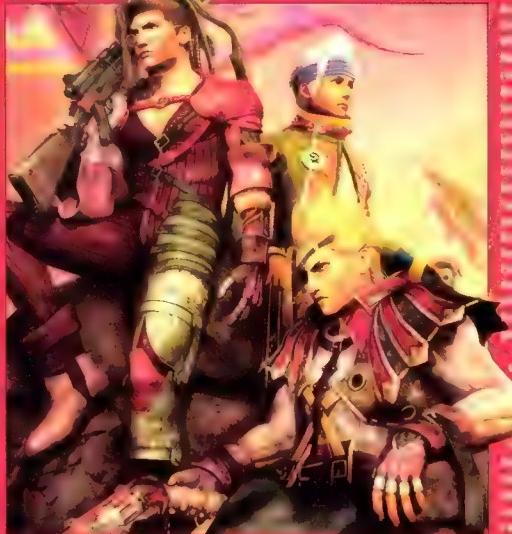
A fitting setup, considering the game's theme: changes. For Nojima, that notion extends beyond the passive sense of the word. "It's also about the willingness to challenge yourself," he explains. "To not have to think about the end result, but focus on process of transformation."

Speaking of changes, Nojima saw this sequel as the perfect chance to alter the way the story unfolds. Unlike a typical straight-line narrative, *FFX-2* is built in bite-sized nuggets, with each mission lasting anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours; you can play them in any order you like (with a few limitations, naturally). Plus, at certain points, your decisions will actually affect the outcome of the game. "In the previous *Final Fantasies*, we never had room to even consider creating a story based on a Free Scenario system," Nojima says. Simply put, this was the best opportunity to make this change." Nojima also cites a recent trend toward shorter gameplay experiences. "You don't have to stress about playing 80 hours to finish a game. There's replay value, but you can get through the game in a decent amount of time."

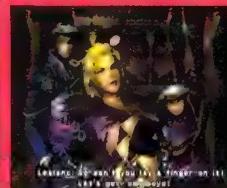
Nojima compares the *FFX-2* experience to channel surfing. "Like changing channels on a TV, you have the ability to choose which mission you want to see," he says. This storytelling technique helped free him up to add more humor, variety, and spice to the missions. From helping Yuna hand out balloons while wearing a moogle costume, to battling an errant Eeon who's out for your destruction, the missions are as varied as it gets. Some focus on fast action, others feel like an elaborate minigame, and still others are built around RPG mainstays such as dungeon exploration and combat.

The Free Scenario system also was perfect for *FFX-2*'s lighter story. Wacky antics work better in small doses, interspersed with the heavy moments we've come to expect from *Final Fantasy*. "The Free Scenario system really helped me capture the right timing," Nijima says.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS



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Blood
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FINAL FANTASY X-2

DRESS you up in my LOVE

Love 'em or don't, you can't deny the breathtaking beauty of the awesome summon animations that have become a *Final Fantasy* hallmark. But with the Aeons now set free (yes, that's an *FFX* spoiler—sue us), what could possibly replace them? Art Director Shintaro Takai has the answer.

"If you look at our previous *Final Fantasies*, there has always been this one glamorous high point where we say, 'Take a look at what we have. This is the very best from this *Final Fantasy* game.' I definitely think the costume changes qualify as that high point," Takai says.

While there wasn't any goal to make the transformations even more attractive than the summoning animations in *FFX*, it's nice to see something that can replace it and have as much of an impact as the original!

Those transformation animations—spectacular though they may be—are more than just a case of adding a layer of fluffy whipped frosting to an already tasty cheesecake. Changing costumes is actually the centerpiece of *FFX-2*'s gameplay. Throughout the game, you can acquire

up to 14 different dresspheres—items that not only alter the way you look, but also change your job class! There are also three special dresspheres, one for each gal—but we don't want to spoil those for you.) You change dresspheres on the fly during battles, meaning your party can switch between 2,744 possible battle configurations—if you find all the dresspheres, that is.

But why costumes? Why not go with a less sartorial take on the job system?

We wanted to make sure we had enough freshness—something to keep things going," says Kitase. In *FFX*, you were able to choose who you wanted in battle from among seven characters. You were able to swap in and out during battle, too. With *FFX-2*, we knew there were going to be only three girls in the party, and you wouldn't be allowed to switch in and out with any of the other characters, such as Wakka or Lulu from the original story. In order to maintain something similar, we wanted the girls to have enough outfits so that it gave you a lot of variations throughout the battles.

(Continued on page 136)



GUN MAGE

Want to unload a deadly barrage of energy? Then you'll need to be a Gun Mage. These girls are the ones who can dish out the most damage in the party. They're also the ones who can't take much punishment, so be sure to keep them safe.



ALCHEMIST

Called Item Shooter in Japan, this job class takes a lot of effort to be effective, but the payoff is extraordinary: just ask Battle Planning Director Takeshi Nakazawa. "I'm not a huge fan of action games, so I tend to look for characters that don't require a whole lot of action," he says. "But I enjoy the other tasks involved with developing a very strong character. Item Shooter requires you to acquire a lot of items, but it's very strong in the end." Not only does an Alchemist have an unlimited reserve of potent potions, but she can mix items for incredible effect. Fun fact: Every Gunner class has that cute side skirt—except for Paine's Alchemist. Apparently, it would have made her look too feminine.



GUARDIAN



With defense coming from the outside, Gunners are the perfect tank. They're built to withstand a lot of damage, and they can dish out some serious fire power when they need to. They're also great at supporting their teammates with their healing abilities.



WARRIOR

Recognize that sword Yuna's carrying? Yep, it's based on the weapon Tidus wielded in *FFX*. While you're at it, take a gander at Rikku's sword, which is a riff on the one carried by that legendary guardian Auron. Only Paine gets to carry a unique piece of high-end cutlery. "This is her own weapon," says Alternate Costume Designer Tetsu Tsukamoto. "It doesn't belong to anyone else." Keep an eye out for the similar symbol on all three of Paine's warrior-class swords. It's only fitting, since Paine doesn't have a connection to the previous game, and since this is also her default class. Powerful in the classic sense, a Warrior can easily overpower most enemies while maintaining a strong defense.



SAMURAI



DARK KNIGHT



BERSERKER

The Berserker is exactly what you'd expect: a powerful fighting machine that will pummel away until the bitter end. It's a favorite for Nakazawa because "it gets the job done even without my having to put a lot of effort into it," he says. "I'm blown away more by the looks than what it actually does." Tsukamoto admits to having some trouble designing these costumes. At first, Yuna looked too much like a four-legged creature, so her outfit had to be modified. Meanwhile, Rikku's Berserker was too different from Yuna's, so he added the markings to create a consistency between the three girls. Tsukamoto still wonders if Rikku is showing too much skin—but we're not complaining!

FINAL FANTASY X-2

DRESS you up in my LOVE (pt. 2)

Although the final selection of dress-spheres was determined by the entire development team, you can credit Tetsu Tsukamoto, alternate costume designer for creating such an eye-popping array of outfits. Drawing from all kinds of real-world inspirations—from high fashion glossies like *Vogue* to the fan-tactical costume design in movies like *The Fifth Element*, Tsukamoto set out to create a collection of clothing that would reflect the unique personality of each underlying job. But with such whimsical designs, was he ever worried about going too far?

To be honest I was quite surprised about how extreme we were allowed to be, because I didn't want to create costumes that would feel too much like they're part of an anime," Tsukamoto confides. But when Nomura-san [a.k.a. Tetsuya Nomura, the character designer for FFX, who returned to create the default costumes for Yuna, Rikku, and Paine] sent me an image of Rikku I was almost shocked that it was OK to go this far. Based on that, I didn't feel

as if I had any restrict on.

For more on how the costumes work, check out the descriptions to the right, or flip ahead to page 138 for a break down of the battle system. And for a sampling of the costumes in action, pop that playable demo into your PS2 (look for the PlayStation Underground logo for an indication of which costumes are available on the disc). Just be sure to try them all, Tsukamoto suggests, or else you'll be missing the point of the game.

The dress-change system is something that we almost want to force you to do," he says. "That is the game. Aside from the story, and aside from it being a shooter, that's what the enjoyment should be focused on. I think we did it in a way that you...oh, I feel like you have to change it simply because you can. At three times you can change on the fly during battle, and you feel like changing every other turn to help with different monsters and different strategies."

You should enjoy changing dress-spheres. If you don't do that, there's almost no reason to play this game.



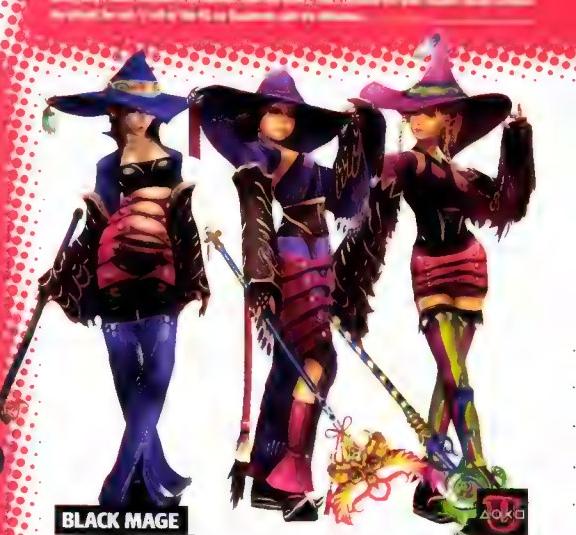
SONGSTRESS

"Songstress might seem



WHITE MAGE

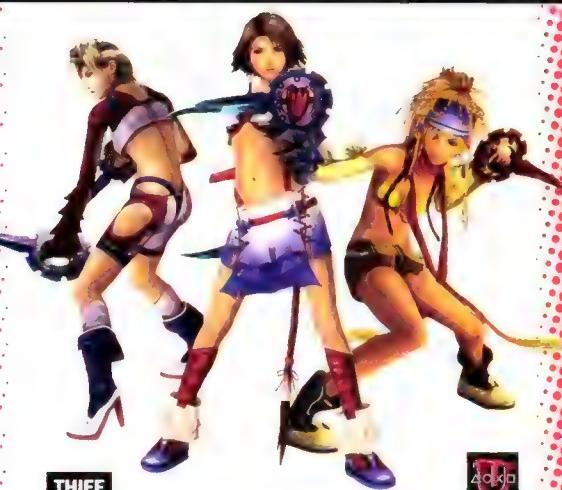
need for fantasy



BLACK MAGE

Oh, my! This is some seriously hot stuff. It's one of our favorite costumes, for the same reason that Director Motomu Tonyama cites: "Just from a design standpoint, I love Rikku's Black Mage because of her miniskirt." Think she looks good from the front? Well, she's just as sexy from the other side. Pop in our demo disc, get into a battle, and make sure you take a peek at the way Rikku shakes her money-maker at the end of combat. But the Black Mage isn't just eye candy. She can cast all those classic offensive spells, which are essential against certain enemies. Now, excuse us while we stare at these lovely lasses for a little while longer.





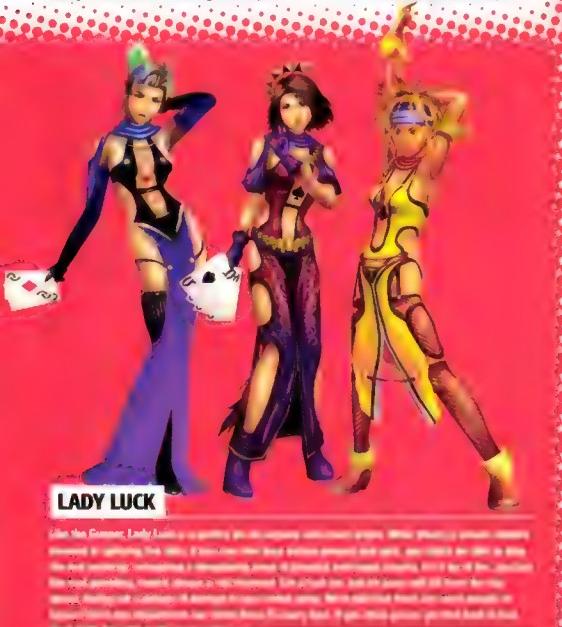
THIEF

What kind of self-respecting thief wears high heels? The sexy kind! Apparently, Tsukamoto designed Paine and Yuna so they'd have as much sex appeal as Nomura's original design for Rikku's default character. We think he succeeded. In terms of gameplay, using a Thief early and often will help you later on, as your character will end up quicker than most of the enemies out there, no matter what class you're using. Plus, Her Steal ability is essential if you want to have a strong Alchemist, some of those miasma items are hard to find any other way. We also love the fact that the Thief always lands with two attacks, creating an automatic chain that heightens her power.



TRAINER

The following class periods will be devoted to the study of the following topics:



LADY LUCK



MASCOT

Square asked us not to spoil these costumes for you, and who are we not to oblige? Instead, we bring you yet another fun fact. Apparently, Square had considered an even weaker job for this final dresphere. "We were looking for a job that would be half serious and half joke," says Nakazawa, "and a French Maid form came up during the idea phase. It ended up being completely different." The maid concept was scrapped because the team just couldn't get it to work. The idea was to have her to perform, much like the Yojimbo Aeon in *FFX*. "But if you think about it, what would happen if you run out of money?" Nakazawa asks. "Who would own her?"

FINAL FANTASY X-2

LOVE is a battlefield

all it one of those great RPG ironies: *Final Fantasy's* Active Time Battle system, in which characters would take their turns in pseudo-real-time, was actually slower than many purely turn-based systems. See, there's that small problem of waiting for your turn to come up.

Which is why we were so enamored with the Conditional Turn-Based system in *Final Fantasy X*. It not only added a nifty strategic element to battles, but also sped up combat by letting you take your turns immediately.

So why return to the ATB in *FFX-2*? Because it was the biggest possible change that could be made to this sequel, according to Battle Planning Director Takatsugu Nakazawa. "If you think about it, we are using the same world, similar environments and monsters, and also, most of the characters are returning. So if we kept the same battle system, it would have been really repetitive. We wanted to make it fresh for the sequel." But isn't a return to the basic battle system that's been a part of every *Final Fantasy* from *FFIV* to *FFIX*, just more of the same thing?

Not if you tweak it so that it feels totally different. In *FFX-2*, everything moves at lightning speed, with quick encounters that can speed by in just a few seconds. Turns come up almost immediately, letting you practically button-mash your way through combat. Boss battles are exhilarating, adrenaline-pumping affairs that will keep you on the edge of your seat. There's never a moment to rest, and you'll often need to think several steps ahead to beat some of the bigger baddies. "In the previous installments when we used the ATB system, it was primarily used to indicate the order of the characters' turns," Nakazawa says. "This time, it's not just the characters' order, but also when the characters will execute their moves. And that's not just your allies, but your enemies as well. It brings the speed up a little bit more. You're not just waiting around for your turn to come."

Other changes: You can now chain your attacks together, leading to all kinds of quirky strategic maneuvers. Try, for example, waiting an extra half-second for two of your girls' turns to come up, then attack at once to exponentially increase the damage. Or tack a final sword swipe on to the end of a chain of Gunner hits for a big boost. You can even halt an enemy's attack if you wack it at the right moment.

It's fun, it's different, it's incredibly addictive. It's also a perfect complement to the lighthearted nature of this sequel. "I would say that the lighter tone of the story influenced the battle system," says Nakazawa. "It definitely makes sense to have more of a fast-paced system."

BATTLE SYSTEM 101

The conflict in *FFX-2* might feel familiar, but it's got new looks in store. Final Fantasy



Next, take the job system that was introduced in *FFVII*, refined in *FFV*, and perfected in *Final Fantasy*.

Tactics

...plus in the character-swapping mechanic from *FFX*...



...and you've got the crazy costume-changing dress-up mode!



Finally, take the Sphere Grid from *FFX*...

...shrink it, make it readily accessible during battle, and make lots of them with all kinds of characteristics...

"I would say that the lighter tone of the story influenced the battle system. Also, *FFX-2* uses the nonlinear Free Scenario setup. It definitely makes sense to have more of a fast-paced system."

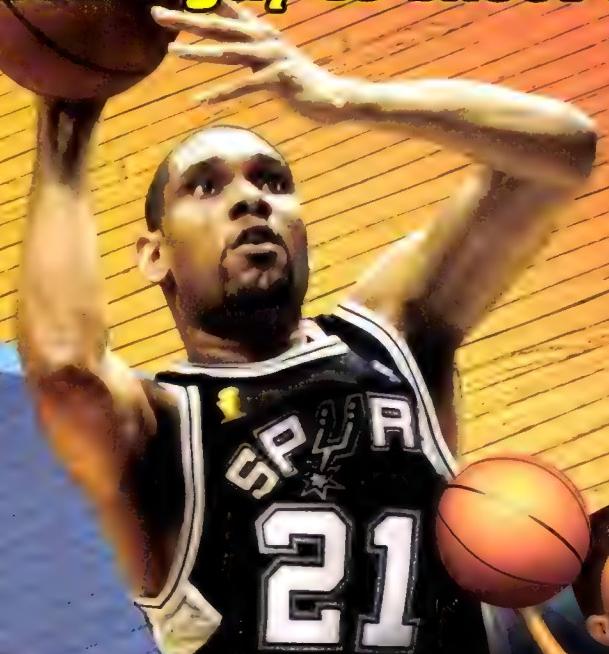


RODACIOUS BATTLES

When you first start playing, you might wonder what the ATB is all about. And that's understandable, because the Active Time Battle system is a bit of a mind-bender. But once you get the hang of it, you'll realize that it's a great complement to the lighthearted nature of this sequel.

It's fun, it's different, it's incredibly addictive. It's also a perfect complement to the lighthearted nature of this sequel. "I would say that the lighter tone of the story influenced the battle system," says Nakazawa. "It definitely makes sense to have more of a fast-paced system."

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FINAL FANTASY X-2

justify my
LOVE

Sometimes, change is good. In the case of *FFX-2*, change is a very good thing indeed.

We asked Kitase, who is been at the head of the *Final Fantasy* food chain for several installments now, whether he prefers *FFX* or *FFX-2*. While he couldn't definitely commit to picking one over the other, he did admit to being happy with what his team accomplished with *FFX-2*. "My job is to see where our games can go in different forms, different shapes, and different ways," Kitase says. "In that sense, I'm more satisfied with the way *FFX-2* has turned out. It shows our fans—as well as new gamers who might join the *Final Fantasy* community—that we can change things. That there are ways to expand beyond what we've done, which is to tell a new story in every single installment. In that sense, *FFX-2* has given us a new way of thinking and a new look to the *Final Fantasy* franchise. Change is good, once again."

For Nakazawa, *FFX-2* succeeds for a simpler reason. It offers something for all kinds of players. "I guess if I were to try to sell this game, I'd say it's a good blend of someone who doesn't prefer action and someone who really likes action," he says, referring to the fact that some members of the team love the action elements that are a part of the exploration as well as certain costumes, such as Lady Luck and Gunner. "In that sense, this is a unique version of *Final Fantasy*—it's not your typical *Final Fantasy* game. But if *FFX-2* were just another serious installment, then this would never have worked. It's almost like we got away with something that's usually not applied or approved."

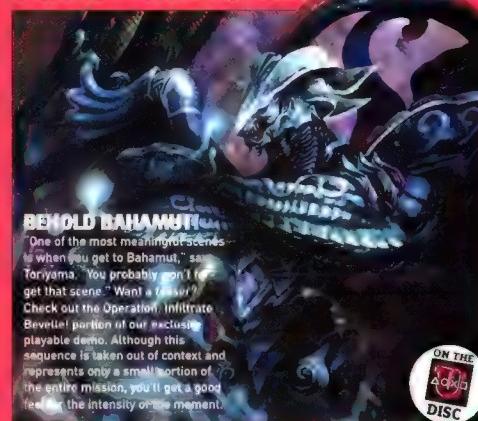
If you're still on the fence with the new direction here, check out our exclusive playable demo right now. Or, flip ahead a few pages for our review. Just keep in mind that you're in for a different kind of *Final Fantasy* experience.

One of our goals was to accomplish something we weren't able to do with *FFX-2*: includes a lot of those new opportunities, breaking your typical *Final Fantasy* rules, Kitase says. If gamers can accept that, that would make us happy.

Once the game is in players' hands, Toriyama is sure they'll be hooked. With this Free Scenario system—not only in terms of the story, but also having all kinds of missions—it's basically up to gamers how they want to play it, Toriyama says. "You don't have to follow any rules, but just enjoy the game."

Well, maybe one rule—or at least a very strong suggestion. The more you play, the more you will see at the end, Tsukamoto says. "Make sure that you play it so you get to the happy ending."

7 MORE THINGS ABOUT *FFX-2*



BEHOLD BAHAMUT!

"One of the most meaningful scenes is when you get to Bahamut," says Toriyama. "You probably won't get that scene." Want a preview? Check out the Operation: Infiltrate Beveler portion of our exclusive playable demo. Although this sequence is taken out of context and represents only a small portion of the entire mission, you'll get a good feel for the intensity of the moment.



FULL TILT

Want to play *FFX-2* on your PC? You can download the game from Square Enix's website, but you'll need to buy a copy of the game first.



FULL SONG

Finally, here's the full lyrics to the song "Fake Emotion" by Koda Kumi:



FUTURE FANTASY

FFX-2 is fronted by the chart-topping Japanese singer Koda Kumi. She's the first non-Japanese artist to record a song for a *Final Fantasy* game.



FAKE EMOTION

Not only did Koda Kumi, a fast-rising J-pop star, provide the vocals for Yuna's opening song, but she was also mo-capped for the dance moves. Too bad you won't hear her voice in the U.S. version. Although Kumi recorded an English version of "Real Emotion," it kinda stunk (it sounded like she was reading—and mangling—a phonetic transliteration of the English lyrics). Square Enix U.S.A. wisely opted to have it rerecorded by a gal who's known as Jade from Sweetbox. To find out more about her, head to www.sweetbox.com.

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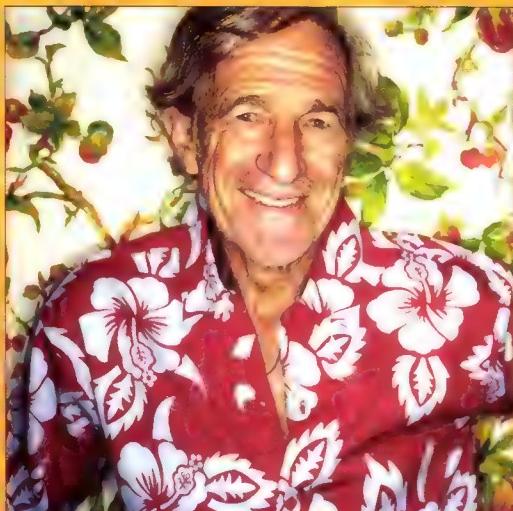
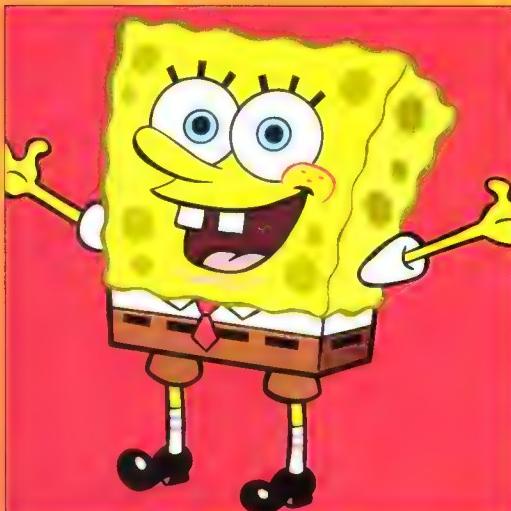
SPRING TIME

Even though it's winter in Japan, the weather is still warm enough for the characters to go outside without their coats. This is a common sight in the game, and it's a nice break from the usual cold weather.

STAND AND DELIVER

Notice how Yuna, Rikku, and Kairi are standing in a line, ready to attack. This is a common sight in the game, and it's a nice break from the usual cold weather.

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REVIEWS

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MEET THE CRITICS



JOHN DAVISON

John and his wife Andrea gave birth to their son William on September 14. **Current Favorites:** SSX 3, Prince of Persia, SOCOM II. **Favorite Genres:** Driving, racing, hitting stuff.



GARY STEINMAN

Gary was gonna complain about how hard he's been working, but he realized his job is still better than yours. **Current Favorites:** FFX-2, Going Commando, BG&E. **Favorite Genre:** RPG.



JOE RYBICKI

SOCOM II's improved ground cover has taught Joe the value of remaining unseen. **Current Favorites:** SOCOM II, POP, TSOT, School of Rock. **Favorite Genres:** Puzzle, Adventure, Gary Smells.



CHRIS BAKER

C. Baker estimates he slew around 12,892 skeletons, orcs, Foot ninja, and old Chinese dudes this month. **Current Favorites:** LOTR: Return of the King, DW4, XL. **Favorite Genre:** Action.



THIERRY (SCOOTER) NGUYEN

Scooter went to Hawaii, so Gary cast a curse that turned him into a monkey. **Current Favorites:** Metal Arms, R&C2, LOTR, ROTK. **Favorite Genres:** FPSing, RPing, Monkeying, Robots.



GIANCARLO VARANINI

The September earthquake only reaffirmed Giancarlo's belief that Japan rocks. **Current Favorites:** ESPN Basketball, Castlevania, SC II. **Favorite Genres:** Action, Sports, Robot Ninja Dogs.

PRINCELY A time to kick ass

Rarely has such a classic game gotten such a spectacular upgrade. That's one of the reasons *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* is our Game of the Month.

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154
JUMP!

Ratchet ratchet up the fun



160
FIRE!

Master call for a hero
SOCOM II will kick your ass



170
FIGHT!

One flight to rule the land
Return of the King rocks!



I really like to waste your time with an extended discussion of what arrived at my score, but in case it's actually relevant. So budge me.

For the past month, I've had a running argument rattling around my brain: Should FFX-2 get a 4.5 or a 5? In other words, Am I really enjoying this as much as I think I am?

I get the feeling a lot of you will be wondering the same thing. Now, I'm not talking about the score—that's my job, thank you very much. I'm referring to how you might struggle with the notion that you really love this.

Tossing up all kinds of blocks while you're too silly. It's too girly Final Fantasy.

The most fun I've had in Final Fantasy. I'm not saying it's the greatest Final Fantasy ever, I still like FFX the best. But I do feel a sentimental attachment to this game of pure fun.

With that in mind, here are my loaded arguments against FFX-2, along with my reasons for refuting them.

It's just a sequel. Think this is an estrogen-heavy rehash of FFX? Think again. FFX-2 is a vastly different game. I Read through our review for all the reasons, but if you're worried that a return trip to Spira might get tedious, have no fear: FFX-2 gives you the best of both worlds: those warm, fuzzy feelings you get from wandering into a familiar place and stumbling across a familiar face, along with the freshness of a world rebuilt after a devastating war with Sin.

I don't like the ATB. Hey, I was as happy as the rest of you to see the worn-out Active Time Battle system replaced by FFX's strategic CTB combat system. But, see, this is ATB done right. The constantly ticking clock moves fast enough to make

Attack one enemy.



things feel frenetic yet fun. The new Chain feature lets you add all kinds of strategic [yet active] twists to the action; I found myself holding my Dual Shock in some of crazy positions, trying to quickly tap R1 while scrolling through options on the D-pad and punching X to trigger a powerful Chain. And the dress-up mode is a great take on the Final Fantasy job system. Like I said in the feature, you can choose among 2,744 possible party makeups, and that's with just three playable characters! I also love the way the Garment Grids let you further customize your battle setups, giving you an assortment of power-up mini-Sphere Grids that you can activate on the fly.

It's too girly. And the problem is...? Seriously, these are great characters. I love them all, and not just in my typical girly-manga-obsessed creepy way. Underneath their clothes, these young ladies have some serious backstory. There's a lot going on here, so pay attention.

Mission-based gameplay? Blech! Oh, you're just never gonna be happy, are ya? For years, you complain about the linear nature of Final Fantasy; finally, you get something non-linear and it's not good enough? Look, these missions actually open up the world of Spira. From the very beginning, you can go anywhere; do anything, see whatever you

like. The mission-based gameplay also makes every segment feel unique. Each mission has a different angle, from quick-hit minigames to straight-up exploration to, er, Monkey Love (I kid you not), adding an unprecedented variety to the gameplay.

One thing to keep in mind: though: The more you put into FFX-2, the more you'll get in return. To experience the full story, you'll have to visit areas that don't have any highlighted missions. Search around and you're bound to trigger a story sequence or a side-quest that no one adds to the story, but rewards you with anything from a Garment Grid to a new dressphere. If you're the type who's not predisposed to exploration, you won't have as much fun. Then again, you can always replay the game, since there are multiple endings.

It's too silly. Lighten up. Bring back the summons! The exquisite costume-change animations are more than adequate to satisfy my need for elaborate eye candy. But if you really miss those Aeons, I'll say (without spoiling too much) that they're around.

Shut up. No, you shut up. So there you have it. Read about it, try it, buy it. Final Fantasy X-2 is brilliant. So get over yourself and have a great time.

Gary Steinman



FINAL FANTASY X-2

Get into the groove

Publisher: Square Enix USA Developer: Square Enix MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Teen

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Ooh...shell shock

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: Everyone

Donatello may be the brainy turtle, but never accuse him of lacking a sense of humor. After using his bo staff to kick the butt of a Foot Ninja or mouser in *TMNT*, he's known to say things like, "Anyone for stickball?" I have the stick, you be the ball!" Funny, yes—but it's not the kind of thing you wanna hear every few times you hit Square.

This may sound like a silly—"Anyone for stickball?"—thing to pick on, but let me assure—"Anyone for stickball?!" have—"you that repeat—"An"—"adly hearing Donnie and pals say this phrase and—"Anyone for stickball?!"—ones like—"Any"—"It is about as enjoy—"Anyone for stickball?!" I have the stick, you be—"able as reading this sentence—"Anyone for stickball?!"—ence. As you may have guessed, they often don't even feel the need to complete the phrase. And worse yet, you can't shut them the shell up!

It's a shame that so many little nuisances like that one have to add up against an otherwise solid beat-em-up. *TMNT* features some great controls. Each hero in a halfshell has a distinct play style based on his weapon of choice and personality. Raphael is all business with his short, quick sai, for example, while party-dude Mikey throws in some breakin' moves with every swing of his nunchaku. Great-looking cel-shaded graphics illustrate the reptilian

brothers as they pull off some cool, well-animated moves in levels designed to mirror the new animated series (and yes, I watch it!).

But oh, how the little things disappoint, frustrate, and annoy. For one thing, if you're assuming that four turtles means four players, think again—only two can play at once, and the second is usually weaker because, for some reason, Splinter allows only Player 1 to learn new moves. What?

Also, remember how the 1989 arcade game had you fight a few Foot Ninjas, then move on, then a few more, then move on? The new game forgets that it's this pace—not fighting drove after drove of enemies in one spot—that keeps a beat-em-up interesting. Further, invisible

walls keep you from advancing, and the fact that you can't see them can lead to major damage. Much like the ill-placed exploding barrels and the foes who attack from offscreen.

The game gets unreasonably hard near the end, where you really start to hate the archaic continue system. It frustrates me that I haven't beaten Shredder—I can't even get to him. I feel so turtle powerless.

I don't need an in-depth story for a game like this, but c'mon, Konami—this isn't 1993. At least try to animate your characters as they speak in cut-scenes—no, the rhythmic bop they do in unison doesn't count.

All these things just make me wanna stop playing and do something else. Stickball, anyone?

Chris Baker



BIONICLE

BIONICLE

Publisher: Electronic Arts/Lego Interactive
Developer: Aeronautic Devotee

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

Use the Suva to hunt for these sons of Makuta. If this tip from a blue robot chick to a green robot dude makes any sense to you, you're likely one of the millions of Lego maniacs who has made the Bionicle toy line one of the company's most successful ever. If not, the only reason for you to play this game is to revel in dorkiness.

Granted, *Bionicle* does have its fun moments, and I really like the variety of gameplay you're doing something different in each of the eight levels. Thing is, if you've been playing games for at least a few years (and that very well might not be the case with much of this game's target audience), you've played all of these stages before. You want elemental-based levels? Fire, snow, water, and air serve as the basis of several levels. Wanna push stuff land maybe get a little lost in adventure areas? You do! Platform-centric stages require lots of double-jumping and collecting glowing items. At other times, you're snowboarding, grinding down tree limbs, and even cruising underground in a mining cart.

A taste of originality exists when you absorb attacks with your defense shield to power up your own assaults. Ironically, though, this mechanic makes *Bionicle* harder—I can't see your average preteen getting past some of the game's more challenging, genuinely frustrating moments. Then again, the off-cut alone is what takes this game a solid five hours to beat. Even hardcore fans are only looking at rental for this one.

Chris Baker



BLOODY ROAR 4

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Hudson

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Mature

I honestly can't think of any reason why you'd want to buy *Bloody Roar 4*, except perhaps that you have some bizarre desire to see a man morph into a six-foot mole and physically abuse a giant chameleon lizard. That does sound kinda cool. Given the strides made in fighting game design over the past couple of years, *BR4* is stuck in the dark ages. Its arenas are cramped, flat, and bland, and its gameplay structure is dated, boring, and laughable. It pretends to be imaginative (there's a swinging arena), but it always falls back on safe, boring ideas.

White Mortal Kombat, Virtua Fighter, and Soul Calibur force fighting gamers to really think about the strategy and also provide more-than-adequate game play incentives. *BR4* lets you mash the buttons to win, with no more satisfaction than seeing when stupid-looking opponent you face next. There's a halfhearted attempt at jazzing things up with a Career mode that lets you track your wins, but it's not on par with its contemporaries.

Character design in *Bloody Roar* has always been ridiculous, but *BR4*'s raise some questionable questions. Why would I want to be a fighter who turns into a bunny, when I have the choice to be one who turns into a demon covered in spikes? If the hook is that you turn into a creature, why does one of the quirks do no more than change to a different outfit?

There's little to redeem *BR4*. Just buy *Soul Calibur* 2 instead.

John Davison



11/19/04

is the projected release date for *SpongeBob SquarePants: the movie*.



SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM

Publisher: THQ

Developer: Heavy Iron

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Absorbent and yellow and porous is he!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

If nautical nonsense be something you wish,

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Then drop on the deck and flop like a fish!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Whose game on PS2's better than Tak?

SpongeBob SquarePants!

And for that matter, it's better than Jak!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob...SquarePants!

The graphics are charming and just like the show,

SpongeBob SquarePants!

And we bet you thought that our score would be low!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

The humor and writing is really top-notch

SpongeBob SquarePants!

It's just like the show that we all love to watch!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

The gameplay is simple but never gets dull

SpongeBob SquarePants!

There are plenty of puzzles on which you can mull!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob...SquarePants!

John Davidson

Underwear bungee jumping is much fun!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

And tongue boarding's something that has to be done!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob has chums, and he thinks they are swell

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Sandy and Patrick, you play them as well!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Switching between them is what you must do

SpongeBob SquarePants!

To beat evil Plankton and jump over goo!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob...SquarePants!

It's not just for kids, it's for adults as well,

SpongeBob SquarePants!

The gameplay and humor, it really does get.

SpongeBob SquarePants!

It's easily better than most of its peers

SpongeBob SquarePants!

If you don't believe us, we'll yank on your ears!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

Try it, you'll love it, we promise it's good

SpongeBob SquarePants!

It plays just like platform games re-a-ally should!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob SquarePants!

SpongeBob...SquarePants!

John Davidson



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Sometimes, developers will give you all kinds of tantalizing tidbits about their titles. They'll giddily proclaim that their homegrown innovations will "change everything" or that they're "rethinking the genre" or "altering the way we play." Once in a while, it's actually true—take *Grand Theft Auto*—but quite often, it's a heaping helping of hogwash with a mere morsel of truth tossed in. Most of the time, these guys are just smoking their own dope.

For months now, we've been prattling on about the RPG-like elements in *Going Commando*. It's the message the folks at Sony and Insomniac have been delivering to us, and we've passed it on to you, primarily because we bought into it ourselves after blasting through several preview versions.

The good news? *It's all true.* The subtleties of tweaks, along with a handful of inspired but oh-so-obvious additions, have radically changed *Ratchet & Clank*, yielding a sequel that's even better than the first. It's already gotten my vote for Platformer of the Year, second-year running.

I love this game.

From the moment you load it up, *Commando* is instantly enjoyable. Think about it: You get to hop around, blowing the living hell out of all kinds of things (it's OK...they deserve it), in a vibrant, cartoonish world that's bursting at the seams with life and personality. That's gotta be fun, right? Plus, *Commando* is brilliantly balanced, thanks in no small part to its brilliant learning curve.

But fans of the first *Ratchet* already know how satisfying this game can be. So what about all that new stuff?

The biggest improvement—the RPG-style character growth—really and truly changes everything. I kid you not. Replaying a section is now a reward unto



itself, since you gain experience for every enemy you kill. Stuck at a tough spot? No worries. Keep trying, and eventually you'll either get strong enough or earn enough bolts to buy a new weapon that might help you out of a particular jam.

Speaking of weapons, those level up, too, giving you yet another incentive to rotate through your repertoire, trying everything, building up your arsenal of weapons into new, more powerful versions. Some of the weapon evolutions are wonderfully creative and incredibly effective. This not only adds to the game's already significant variety, but also plays a huge role in the weapons strategy. You can employ your own approach to many areas, using different combinations of guns, gadgets, and gaming skills to get by. *Play Commando* at the same time as

pal of yours, and you're sure to have some very different experiences. Weapons strategy is essential, but there's never just one right answer for any situation. That rocks.

Insomniac also implemented a few small fixes that make a big difference. Strafing, for example, lets you focus on your killing spree without worrying about the camera going gonzo. The characters have also grown up somewhat, becoming a bit more appealing in the process (*Ratchet* is less judgmental, *Clank* is more so). And the engaging array of clever gadgets, as well as the selection of full-featured minigames, add a lot of extra spice to this already tasty dish.

But the best thing about *Commando*? It never forgets its game. Take the *Clank* solo missions. Consider the wonderful absurdity of running into a



Hammer Bot ("Use it to hammer objects") right near a point where you have to...hammer something! Insomniac obviously worked hard to create a game that rethinks the platform genre, but it still knows how to have a good time, tossing

a wink and a nod at fellow gamers who also know what this is all about: fun.

Man, I really love this game

Gary Steinman



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PlayStation 2



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CULDECEPT

Publisher: NEC Interchannel

Developer: Candysoft

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: T

Do you like *Monopoly* but wish it featured more fantasy trappings and colorful cards? Well, has NEC got a deal for you with *Culdecept*.

Despite the presence of a 60-page manual, *Culdecept* isn't nearly as complicated as it seems at first glance, essentially, you take over spaces on the board and then spend money to raise their total value. The more spaces of a certain type you own, the more valuable every one of those spaces becomes. Is any of this sounding familiar yet? The twist in the basic *Monopoly* format is the use of creature, item, and spell cards to maintain your hold on the properties you've taken.

The result is, as these things tend to be, variably enjoyable depending on whether you're playing against people or the computer. There's a goofy story mode for single player, wherein the world's oddest mentor figure (a kind of wizened, humanoid worm) leads you around a map as you thwart evildoers and save the world through playing board games. The multiplayer mode is more traditional, but at least it doesn't have a CPU opponent that seems to give itself the best draws and rolls on every turn.

Both modes, though, are enhanced by very nice graphics for a game of this sort, including some keen card art. (Though some of it is pretty risqué, so know what you're getting into before inviting the whole family to join in.) Anyone who liked *Top Shop* on PS1 should check this out.

Nich Maragos



DYNASTY WARRIORS 4: XTREME LEGENDS

Publisher: Koei

Developer: Omega Force

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: T

It's easy to write off *Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends* as just an expansion pack to one of the greatest, most epic hack-n-slash games ever—and in some ways that's fair. Given a choice between owning only *Xtreme* and owning only the original, *Dynasty 4* released last spring (unlike most PC expansion packs, you don't need the core game to play *Xtreme*, you're still getting a better package with the older choice). But this one is worth picking up, too.

Defeating the new *Legends* mode with each of the game's 42 characters easily yields well over 10 hours of gameplay in itself. In this mode, each Three Kingdoms badass is confronted with a single, wholly unique mission-based loosely, have no dojiri on Chinese history, where it's quite literally he or she against hundreds upon hundreds of enemies, with minimal help. A powered-up character from *Dynasty 4* makes things considerably easier; without one, you might find yourself switching the difficulty to Easy just so you stand a chance.

The other new mode of note, *Xtreme*, sort of combines the "buy stuff" element of adventure games with the concept of Survival mode in a fight ng game. Choose your character and continue fighting a series of randomly generated, somewhat smaller battles until he dies. Your health doesn't regenerate between battles, so it's imperative to use the points you've earned to buy health and other power-ups between skirmishes. You can even get other characters to join your cause by performing specific tasks for them in a given battle. I love the

idea behind *Xtreme* mode, but there's a catch. Since everything is random (and maybe even because this is just an expansion pack), you're not getting any story here, nor do you have any sort of ending to look forward to. You just go until you bite it. It sort of feels like a really deep arcade game, which might be perfect for anyone who just wants to kick butt for an hour or so every so often.

The rest of *Xtreme*'s additions are kind of nice, but no big deal. new arena challenges, the ability to make your maxed-out characters even stronger, new difficulty levels, that kind of thing. *Dynasty Warriors* maniacs (i.e., people like me) will live it. The rest of you should only bother if you'd rather pay 20 bucks less for a stripped-down version of what the full game has to offer.

Chris Baker



FIFA SOCCER 2004

Publisher: EA Sport

Developer: EA Sport

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: Everyone

It was only a matter of time before *FIFA* got the full-on *Madden* treatment, and now it's finally happened. Every year things have improved, but the franchise has never quite had the same kick behind it as its stablemate. This year sees the most comprehensive overhaul of the game that I can remember seeing in a long time, and it ably exemplifies the dramatic differences between EA Sports' approach to the game, and that of Konami with *Winning Eleven*.

The new features *FIFA* boasts would take forever to list, so here are the most significant. First, it has online play now—and all of the lobby-related goodness that we now come to expect from EA Sports. Second, there's a new "off the ball" control method (and they've even trademarked the term).

With such a spectacularly comprehensive approach to the sport and the business that surrounds it, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the intimacy of the game was lost. *Winning Eleven* has always bested *FIFA* in this regard, and I think at a push, it still does. That said, with all of the new stuff piled on top of the game in *FIFA*, it's admirable to see such a major reworking of the way it plays. The sensation of *FIFA* "playing itself" is pretty much gone, and it's clear that the A.I. has been seriously overhauled.

The answer to "*Winning Eleven* or *FIFA*?" is now purely a matter of taste. Both are excellent for different reasons, but if you want to fully immerse yourself in soccer culture, *FIFA* is pretty incredible.





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Stop for a moment and make a list of everything you would have liked to have seen done better in the first *SOCOM*. OK, time's up, pencils down. Let's take a look at your list.

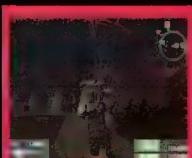
Does it include things like smarter enemies and teammates? Does it include better voice recognition and handling of voice chat in online play? How about bigger, more detailed, more realistic levels? Are online buddy lists there? How about deeper options for setting up a game online? Denser foliage to hide in? A wider

array of weapons? I'm sure some of you crazy bastards put stuff like rocket launchers and respawning and retooled versions of the original online maps.

Well, guess what? If you have any of these things on your list, *SOCOM II* is going to make you one happy camper. No, Zipper didn't read your minds; they just read your messages—you know, the ones you posted in places like magazine message boards that you think developers never read.

Let's start with the one-player mode: Mission structure is now

much deeper and more varied. You might start off with just a few basic objectives, but these branch out, opening new primary and secondary objectives as you go on. (And while we're on the topic, there are a lot more secondary objectives, which will have the obse-



TRUMPET LICK

A former student of mine

had this to say about the game's difficulty: "It's like being forced to eat a meal you don't like, but you have to eat it all because you paid for it."

sives among us working even harder to get everything just right.)

There are also a bunch of bonus objectives that will carry over from mission to mission; some levels will have just one bonus objective, others might have three or four. These contribute to your overall grade—which is now much more detailed, by the way. You get very specific stats of how you did (both single player and online), which make it much easier to try for a higher grade the next time around.

The whole game also has a lot more personality—for example, if you're stealthy, you'll overhear enemy conversations all over the place. These can offer important information or be completely irrelevant (and often comical). All the AI characters have a lot more depth—and a lot more intelligence (although on the easiest difficulty, they still seem a little clueless).

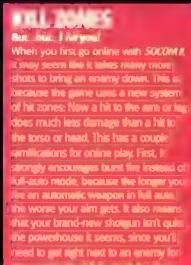
Your team is a lot smarter, too;



members now listen to what you tell them. They'll get in your way from time to time, but generally, they're really good about anticipating what you're asking of them.

And then there's the online mode. Holy crap, it's awesome. The new levels, with the exception of maybe one or two, are just incredible; they're designed in such a way that you want to try to rescue the hostages or blow up the enemy base—not just kill all the bad men. And the new options for setting up a game are most welcome: You can queue up as many maps as you want, you can set game length and number of rounds required to win, and you can make adjustments to available weapons (e.g., sniper rifles only, no explosives, pistols only). And yes, you can even choose to allow respawning (or suppression maps only, though).

In short, *SOCOM II* has addressed nearly every complaint had about the first game, and added a bunch of new features on top of that. If you like the first game at all, run—don't walk, run—to get this game. I'll see you online. Joe Rybicki



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Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance



Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance

GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE

Publisher: Acclaim

Developer: Acclaim Studios Manchester

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** Mature

If you're like me, you can usually tell within the first few minutes of a game whether or not you're going to love or hate it. *Gladiator* is an exception to that rule.

The opening sequence is quick-paced and gives an overall feeling of triumph as you hack-n-slash through teams of other gladiators in front of an enthusiastic crowd of 50,000. The new evil emperor has you, *Thraix* (the former Emperor Trajan's greatest gladiator—all bogus history, by the way), and has thrust you into an invigorating battle royale, taunting you all the while. An epic score and cinematic camera angles further the feeling of being a polygonal Russell Crowe. But soon enough, you're thrust into a mythic land of skeletons, cyclops, and other such foes—and it's all downhill from there.

With every hack and slash you execute—and there will be *thousands* in this very gory game—the enthusiasm you felt during the first 10 minutes dwindles exponentially. You soon realize what a limited combat system of *Thraix* boy has at his disposal—one so flawed and needlessly complicated that you never feel like you have full control. Even when you fight well, a mass of random particle effects absolutely engulfs *Thraix* boy; you want to fight poorly just so the effect wears off and you can see him. At certain points, you simply feel total frustration—you just wanna stop playing sometimes. Of course, you're better off never starting at all.

Chris Baker



I-Ninja

I-NINJA

Publisher: Namco

Developer: Argonaut

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** Teen

I had such high hopes for *I-Ninja*. From the moment I first laid eyes on him at this year's E3, I was smitten with the game's too-cute mini-ninja. Now, after beating the game, I still have high hopes.

In other words, *I-Ninja* is a bit of a disappointment.

That's not to say this is a bad game. In fact, *I-Ninja* does what it does very well, offering a decent challenge, a few hearty chuckles, and plenty of personality.

Unfortunately, *I-Ninja* doesn't do a heckuva lot of well... anything. You can easily beat this game in a few short sessions, and you'll quickly forget about it afterward.

But, see, I still love this character. Plus, Argonaut has proven it can make a polished (if derivative) platformer that has the potential to stand with the big boys. So here's

my plea to hardcore platform fans and uh, rich kid everywhere. Buy this game. For me. If only so I can see a sequel!

Here's what you'll get: Five worlds, each with a handful of levels. I think there's about 20 in all, but that's not counting the bonus areas and the boss fights. Each level is a total blast, full of just about every platformer trick under the sun: jumping segments, superfantastic ninja combat, rail grinds, Sonic-esque speed tracks, more jumping bits, mini-bowling (think Sega's *Super Monkey Ball*), but with a mindless helm, mow down waves of enemy ninjas, ninja wall running, more jumpy bits, a few shooting segments, some clever puzzles, mini-robot battles, ninja factors, a visit to the moon (naturally), and—oh, you guessed it!—even more jumpy bits.

Not bad for a few bucks, but keep in mind that each level is pretty darn derivative, and the levels in each world are a fairly similar plus. You'll be forced to replay these levels almost immediately, since you need to earn credits to unlock later levels. Granted, you'll have to overcome a new set of challenges—defeat X number of enemies, complete in X amount of time—but that's not enough to keep it fresh. Replay value is a very good thing, but forced replay early and often definitely is not.

So although *I-Ninja* is a raucous romp while it lasts, there just isn't enough to it. It's the perfect rental, but a marginal purchase at best.

But you're gonna buy it anyway, right? For me? I really want to see a sequel that lets my favorite ninja shine as brightly as he deserves! **Gary Steinman**



I-Ninja



I-Ninja



Karaoke Revolution

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Konami

MSRP: \$99.99 **ESRB:** Everyone

Karaoke Revolution is more than I expected, but less than I wanted.

It's more than I expected because the collection of songs is really quite spectacular. Looking at the list, you may think there's a lot of songs you wouldn't really care about. Truth be told, you're probably right. But bet you'd be interested in at least 25 percent of the tunes, and that 25 percent is significant because in Showtime mode (the central "career" mode of the game), you get to choose one of four songs for each stage. Those four songs have been very carefully selected so that at least one in each stage should be something with which you have at least a passing familiarity. In fact, there was only one stage in which I really had to fade it through a song, and that's only because I don't listen to the radio enough [more specifically, not at all] to have any kind of knowledge of Michelle Branch.

But that leads me to the only disappointment of the game. As a singer without any formal training those who have heard me sing can attest to that, I was expecting *Karaoke Revolution* to both challenge and train me—that is, I expected to have some difficulty, at least on the higher challenge levels, that could only be overcome by becoming a better singer.

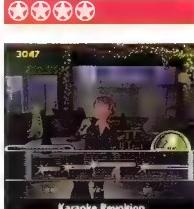
No such luck. Even with my just-passable singing skill, I was able to breeze through the game on Expert difficulty in the time it took to play through each one of the songs. And that's even with fudging my way through that Michelle Branch song.

See, as long as you're roughly in

pitch, you can get by. "Roughly in pitch" is defined more strictly in the higher difficulty levels, but it's still a fairly wide range. And you don't even have to sing the right words; c-bake pointed out that you can hum your way through. It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine) and earn a nearly perfect score. Gary also demonstrated this admirably by professing his love for Giancarlo, loudly and often, throughout a slurring rendition of "Like a Virgin."

As you can probably imagine, though, *Karaoke Revolution* is one hell of a party game. If you like music and you have friends who like music, don't even think about it—buy this. It won't matter if you or your friends can sing, it's more fun if you can't, actually. But if you're looking for a real challenge, you won't find it here.

Joe Rybicki



Karaoke Revolution



Karaoke Revolution

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Kill.Switch



Metal Arms: Glitch in the System



Mobile Suit Gundam: EIS



Mobile Suit Gundam: EIS

KILL.SWITCH

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** Teen

I have to admit to being utterly ambivalent to the whole idea of this game until recently. Since we first saw details about the game, I've feared that it's nothing more than a one-trick pony. The trick? The much-ballyhooed shooting-around-corners-without-looking thing. It's a neat idea, but so what? Surely it's just a gimmick? Well... no.

Kill.Switch isn't a *Metal Gear* clone, nor is it a *Spider Cell* or a *Syphon Filter* wannabe. It's a shooter, pure and simple—but it's filled with cool ideas and a control system to die for. You're not really sneaking around, but you are hiding a lot—and it's the mechanics behind the hiding that makes the game so damn satisfying.

A lot of games try very hard to convey the feeling of being right in the middle of an "oh crap, I'm going to get my ass shot off" fire-fight, but few have captured the pace and tactics needed to survive such an encounter. *Kill.Switch* does a fantastic job though, and as you're ducking behind crates, peering around corners, and moving down bad guys with an assortment of weapons, there's an unbroken level of tension that few games can match. You listen for the enemy fire, wait for them to

reload, come out of hiding, and open up on them. The A.I. is particularly good when it comes to the enemies' reactions to you because you can drive them nuts by just crouching behind something, poking your gun over your head, and spraying the room with bullets. Toss a grenade into a room, and they'll run away, desperate to save themselves.

In a lot of ways, *Kill Switch* feels like it was designed as a first-person shooter and then reworked as a third-person game when the development team twigged to the whole hiding thing. Considering you can see your character, he's actually pretty soulless, and by no means as much of a focal point as Snake, Gabe, or Sam in their respective games. There is something of a twist to the game's story though, and that goes some way to explaining this. I won't spoil it for you, but ultimately, this is more than your usual lone warrior saving the world from unspeakable evil" sh!tstick. It's not a huge shock when the mystery is revealed, but at least you get the feeling that Namco is trying to do something a little different.

This could easily have been just another action game, but the result is far more than that.

John Davison



METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Swing Ape/Mes Media

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** Teen

At first glance, *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System* looks like some sort of *Bionic Knight* knockoff for kiddies, but such impressions are quickly wiped away once you experience the challenging firefights and pushing-the-limits-of-the-Teen-rating dialogue. I laughed and raised my eyebrows when I heard bleeped-out profanity and some fairly shocking innuendoes (the titular Glitch, a cute little scrapper, at one point proclaims to an enemy, "I'll break your leg servos and empty my reserves onto your eyes").

Metal Arms is categorized as a third-person shooter, but "pure, difficult robot combat" is the better phrase for it. There's lots of shooting, jumping, upgrading of weapons, possessing of enemy

robots, and driving, all spanning 41 levels—which translates into significantly more than just a weekend rental. But the unbelievable brutality of the enemy A.I., even in Normal mode, means the game can facilitate from challenging to downright frustrating. Yet, for all the times I was pissed off, I still felt compelled to move on to see the level, and the next weapon upgrade, enemy robot, or vehicle I could use. Plus, Multiplayer caps off the overall package nicely.

Besides its harsh difficulty and a tendency to be a little less-than-clear about mission objectives, the only other real ding against *Metal Arms* is the slowdown that occurs in particularly heavy combat.

Otherwise, this is a surprisingly decent little shooter. Plus, it has swearing robots!

Thierry Nguyen



MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: ENCOUNTERS IN SPACE

Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Bandai

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** Rating Pending

This game gets one star. Let me break down star for you:

One fourth of the star is for Char Aznable, Mobile Suit ace of the Principality of Zeon. One fourth of the star is for Hajime Katoki, designer of the MS-06 Zaku II, whose work I have always admired. One fourth is for Yoshiyuki Tomino, who is insane now, but who was a genius perhaps 20 years ago. And one fourth of the star is for the SD Sayla Mass who trots back and forth on the main loading screen.

The rest of this game gets nothing, and smilés. Even if you're a hardcore *Gundam* fan and are easily duped—like the half-million geeks in Japan who bought this on launch day—you will likely still find it about as fun as a Heat Hawk to the grom. It's a railed shooter with controls so simple and limited that my initial reaction was to assume a fundamental failure of comprehension on my part.

Surely, I thought, I have more options here. Surely, I thought, the auto-aim isn't so simple. Surely, I thought, I can move the Gundam freely on the Y-axis instead of trusting to broken digital pitch controls or watching the cinematic camera move things around for me. Surely, I thought, the challenge level has a setting other than "stupid easy" or "mind-bogglingly confusing because the mutant aiming system bites."

I thought wrong. *Encounters in Space* is just that bad, with only enough finer points to deserve, as accounted for above, one star.

Dave Smith



Metal Arms: Glitch in the System



Kill.Switch



Kill.Switch



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REVIEWS

From the creators
of *Prince of Persia*
comes a new game
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The official site for *The Sands of Time* features a special Java version of the original *Prince of Persia*.



Price of Persia: *The Sands of Time* is one of my favorite games, ever.

I'm tempted to just stop the review there and let you experience this excellent game for yourself, but then you'd be staring at all this blank space and you'd feel like you haven't gotten your money's worth, so I suppose I'll keep going.

Just so you know, though, the rest of this review is basically going to consist of me talking about *Sands of Time* being one of my favorite games, ever. Your time would arguably be better spent getting your ass down to EB to pick up this amazing game than listening to me gush about how amazing a game it is. But hey, it's your life.

Now that we're clear on that, let's talk about graphics. I can't think of a single game that looks better. Not on PS2, not on any other system. And I'm not just talking about technology here; while the game does certainly boast a bunch of eye-popping technology, it goes way beyond that. It goes into the

realm of art.

Wait, what? Art in games? I know, I was as shocked as you are. But there's a level of beauty here that can't be explained away through technology. The softened edges that hint at dust in the air, the gently filtered light, the feathery look of the palm trees...it's all so gorgeous.

Eye candy only goes so far, of course, and most of the time the gameplay doesn't match the standard set by spectacular graphics. Not so here.

Although it would be quite a stretch to call *Prince* a puzzle game, there is a certain cerebral element behind all the running-jumping-swinging gameplay. Like I do, it takes a little bit of thought to figure out how to get from point A to point B. On top of that are a few genuine puzzles—they're not brain-busters, but they will probably throw you for a loop until you figure out the (in retrospect, quite simple) solution.

Unlike *Ico*, thankfully, there's a hell of a lot more action—almost a fault, in fact. As you get deeper into the game you'll end up in the midst of battles that seem like they'll never end. Most of the time, the evolution of your skills and

your comfort with using advanced techniques keeps pace with the ramped-up difficulty in battle...but there were a few moments where I felt overwhelmed. Luckily, the game is extraordinarily forgiving with saves and checkpoints, so much so that you'll never really lose more than a couple minutes of progress.

That's a good thing, because the game proved much longer than I expected. Ubisoft told us they'd estimated it at around 13 hours...but even after all the playing I did while working on last month's feature, it still took me nearly 20 hours.

Complaints? Sure, no game's perfect. I noticed a few areas where the camera went screwy, for example, and the combat can get a wee bit monotonous after awhile.

But look, if you like adventure games, you'll love this game. If you like platform games, you'll love this game. It's got story, it's got action, it's got amazing graphics and some of the best animation you'll see anywhere. It's one of my favorite games, ever. And I've been playing games for a long time.

Joe Rybicki



PRINCE OF PERSIA THE SANDS OF TIME

Excuse me while I pick my jaw off the floor

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Ubisoft MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Teen

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BACKYARD WRESTLING

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Publisher: Eidos

Developer: Paradox Entertainment

Developed by GIGAFOX ENTERTAINMENT

ESRB: Mature

Two of the most despised phenomena in Western civilization—backyard wrestling and the Insane Clown Posse—have been combined to create Eidos' *Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home*. If you strip away the seedy premise, the game shows promise of being a knockoff of Capcom's *Power Stone*, yet it ultimately falls short of replicating the fun and intensity of the Dreamcast classic.

To Backyard Wrestling's credit, the environments are well designed. Since wrestlers aren't confined to a ring, you're free to roam around the areas and interact with it by climbing ladders and scaffolding or by tossing opponents into various objects, such as benches, cars, dumpsters, and tables. There are also plenty of weapons at your disposal, including barbed bats, beer bottles, and even tiki torches. Unfortunately, these items seem to have heat-seeking sensors built in since they almost always automatically make contact with your opponent, regardless of location.

All of this really doesn't mean anything in the grand scheme of things because it's not exactly a



good wrestling game to begin with. Backyard Wrestling only features about eight basic grappling moves per character (four slams and four striking moves), as well as specials, aerial moves, and an assortment of punches and kicks. You can stick with the same grappling move throughout an entire match and have a pretty good chance of winning—even on the hardest difficulty setting. Actually, computer opponents operate in somewhat of a fixed pattern, so the same strategy can basically be used throughout the entire game, making for a thoroughly tedious experience.

The game's extra modes don't

make it any more bearable, either. There's a Talk Show mode, which serves as the traditional story mode for the game, but it's not much more than a few cut-scenes interspersed between matches. The Create-a-Wrestler mode doesn't let you create anything; all you're doing is selecting from several preconstructed characters and then choosing a costume. Sure, you can change the moves for the wrestler, but that's about the extent of the customization available.

Backyard Wrestling fans [yes, they exist] and even regular professional-wrestling fans might be able to overlook the game's shallowness because of the gratuitous violence and scantily clad women, but the novelty of setting a wrestler on fire quickly wears thin. It might be worth a rental, but don't expect to get much mileage out of it.

MAINSTREET BANKER

Page 10

Publisher: INMO

Developer: tecmo

MSRP: \$49.99 **ESRB:** every one
Although it boasts a host of innovations that are supposed to set it a breed apart from its predecessor, *Monster Rancher 4* never captured me in the way *MR3* did.

Maybe it's the graphics These days, I'm as bored by cel-shaded stuff as the next Gary Gamer—but back when *MR3* came out, those crisp, cartoon-y lines looked so good on my favor's brood of beasties. I've always loved the *Monster Rancher* universe; it blows away those dull *Pokémon*. *MR4* is now rendered in 'real' 3D, and while it remains as cute as a Mochi's pink belly, I'm not as captivated by this collection of critters.

But that's not it. I still can't get enough of a capering Suzzo, whatever the graphical style. Rather, it's the gameplay. Bravely, you can now raise multiple monsters at once. You can go on RPG-like dragon-crawling quests. You can purchase new training equipment, and you can customize your Ranch. Yet taken separately, MRZ doesn't have a whole lot going for it. The dungeons are mediocre at best, I probably consider them an utter failure if they were at the heart of a straight-up RPG. And customized weapons and combat abilities are

As for the monster raising it once again boils down to well, scheduling stuff. You know, three weeks training, one week resting, attending this tournament, eating that food. Amusing, sure, but since I don't feel that connected to my monsters, the whole thing feels like work.

now walk around your ranch, doling out praise, criticism, or food, but it's basically just a real-time twist on the same old menu-based gameplay. In the end, it really only serves to highlight how much further I'd have wanted Tecmo to take the game.

Yet I can't help it—I'm a *Monster Rancher* fan. The game has an undeniable charm to it. Plus, it's a blast searching through my CDs and DVDs to spawn all these critters, looking for the occasional inside joke or obscure reference. Fans of the series should definitely check it out.

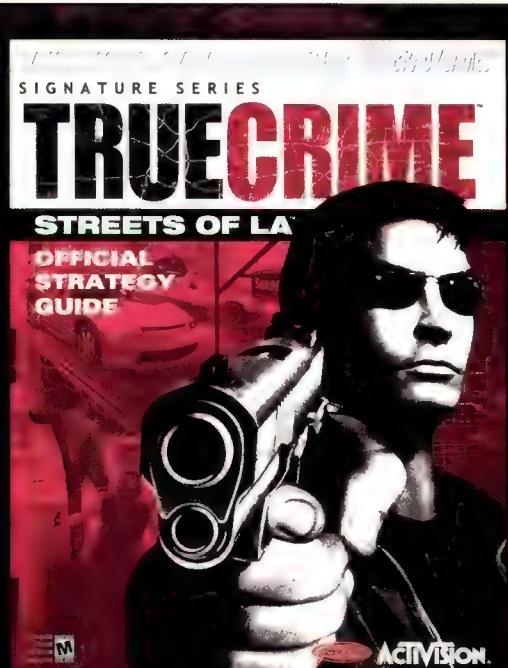
So, yeah—I'll still play the heck out of *Monster Rancher 4*, but rather than getting lost in those multi-hour binges, I'll probably pick it up for an hour now and then, without worrying too much about the fate of my monsters.



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Rating: T
Blood/Fight
Sexual Content
Language
Violence

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ACTIVISION



I've got about 650 words to sum up my thoughts on *The Return of the King*. I only need three letters: A-w-e.

Not one of the game's 13 levels goes by without wowing you in one way or another. Right off the bat, the game throws you as Gandalf into the Battle of Helm's Deep. Fiery masses explode all around you as you learn your basic attacks, how to parry, and (new to this) Lord of the Rings gamel how to use environmental weapons, such as spears and catapults. You're immediately reminded just how satisfying arc-busting can be. It would have been nice to storm in riding Shadowfax, but hey—this is still the most impressive training level you've ever seen. You know you're in for amazing eight to 10 hours to follow.

From there, you can choose one of three paths to take, all of which do a good job of spoiling events from the upcoming movie. In fact, if you haven't read the book (or at least watched the 1980 Rankin/Bass made-for-TV animated movie), I'd advise holding out on this one until you've seen Peter Jackson's upcoming film.

The first path follows Gandalf, beginning with his return to Isengard just after Helm's Deep—right during the Ents' warpath.



MULTIPLAYER

Double your pleasure

If *Towers* lacked anything noticeable besides Gandalf, it was some much-needed simultaneous two-player action. EA not only installed co-op into King but it even took it one step further: You can play the game online with a friend, voice chat and all!

through Saruman's hood. Remember that awe I was talking about? Just imagine welding Glamdring the Foe Hammer as walking trees trapse around you, swatting down Uruk-Hai with vegetational rage. Not to spoil anything, but the end of the level offers a pleasantly surprising climax—you'll see that the White Wizard actually played an integral role during the storming of Isengard.

From there, Gandalf defends Minas Tirith in much the same way *The Two Towers*' heroic trio held off orcs at Helm's Deep, pushing ladders off walls and all. Again, the ambient explosions and inherent feeling of urgency really get your blood flowing with sorcerous power.

Similarly, Sam and Frodo's escape from Osgiliath (the city under attack at the end of *Towers*) to kick off their path is no less exciting. Just the sight of a Nazgûl riding bareback atop an airborne fell beast—not to mention the fact that Gollum's there to help you as Mr. Gamgee skips town—is enough to make any Tolkien fan totally geek out. And they still have Shelob's spider-filled caverns, Sam's infiltration of the orc-filled tower Cirith Ungol, and the final showdown at Mount Doom to go.

Of all the game's paths, the Aragorn/Legolas/Gimli trip made my jaw drop the most. The ghosts they fight in the Paths of the Dead levels might be pancies, but the pure ambience can't be beat. This game comes certified by THX, and surround sound really does make a difference as apparitions fly overhead, searching for a dead body to inhabit. You've never felt this creeped out in a hack-n-slash game. From there, the trio makes its way to Gondor's great city of Minas Tirith. The ensuing route involves plenty of orcs and Easterlings to slice up, as well as a barrage of elephants and the fell beast that carries the head Nazgûl on its back.

As much awe as King inspires,



it also brings out another occasional "aw"—as in "aw, come on!" The game's cinematic camera angles make it look great, but playability sometimes suffers as a result. The boss fight with Shelob is a perfect example, as her huge arachno-ass (perfect for breeding, I'm sure) blocks your character's view as Sam tries to attack, making it really tough. Similar moments occur throughout the game, and the kill-200-orcs-before-you-pass parts can get old. Negative factors like these make me want to knock the game's score down a bit.

But I won't. King is the best, most synergistic convergence of film and videogame I've ever seen. It turns *Two Towers*' wow factor into an emphatic "holy freaking crap!" If the movie succeeds half as well as the game, we're in for a real treat come December 17.

Chris Baker



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Rogue Ops



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Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy

ROGUE OPS

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Bits Studios

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Mature

Even though stealth-oriented action games are starting to wear thin for most people, the level of tension is usually reduced with semi-interesting stories or mechanics that introduce something new to the genre. Unfortunately, *Rogue Ops* doesn't do either. Its story revolves around a generic plot for revenge, and its stealth gameplay mechanics are rather basic and sloppy.

The game here, Nikki Connor, isn't even much of a spy, due to the context-sensitive nature of her abilities. Sure, she can grab ledges, but only ones that have a special green icon displayed in front of them. The same thing applies to many of her other skills. The fact that she can get to areas that would normally be accessible by walking just a small hop doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

There are some surprisingly creative moments in *Rogue Ops*, but for the most part, the mission objectives consist of running around in circles, looking for the appropriate key card to open a door. There are also some really weird less-than-intuitive puzzles, with no real indication as to what you're supposed to do. If that's not enough, the AI can be outrageously bad. Oftentimes, an enemy soldier will be standing right in front of Nikki and will do absolutely nothing.

Rogue Ops is a really bad game for the genre. It's not completely unplayable, but it has more than its fair share of problems.

Giancarlo Varanini



SPACE CHANNEL 5 SPECIAL EDITION

Publisher: Virgin

Developer: Virgin

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: T

If you owned a Sega Dreamcast land let's face it, you probably didn't), chances are you at least heard of this groovy, futuristic music game featuring dancing reporter Ulala and a cool, neo-60s style. Apparently, in the future, we fight alien invaders with the healing power of dance. Nice to know we've become a kinder, gentler race of beings. And that miniskirts and go-go boots will eventually be back in style. Again.

The first game in the set – *Space Channel 5* – ain't all that great. Back when it came out on Dreamcast (three long years ago!), I was sort of neutral, but it hasn't stood the test of time too well. The polygon characters are stylish, but are so simplistic they look remarkably dated. Plus, they're floating



Space Channel 5 Special Edition



Space Channel 5 Special Edition

over grainy full-motion video backgrounds that aren't always synced up with the action, so you get a bit of weirdness happening once in a while.

Laggy controls really hurt *SC5*, though. *Ulala* doesn't respond immediately to button presses, which is especially hard to deal with in a game where everything's based on keeping the beat. On top of that, *Space Channel 5* lasts only about a half an hour from start to finish, and it's a fairly simple half hour, which means you'll be putting this disc back in the box pretty fast.

Things get better upon firing up *Part 2*, though. While the game plays almost exactly like the original, it addresses almost all the problems. Gone is the lag, the graphics are much nicer (though still not up to today's standards), and the game is a bit longer.

The key bit, though, is the variety. In her second adventure, *Ulala* fights many different types of enemies, has face-offs with opposing journalists that play like battles of the bands, and takes on each boss in a very unique way. The whole thing flows much better, whether you're trading shots with armed thugs or dancing along in something that looks more like a Michael Jackson video than a game. You even get a (admittedly somewhat half-assed) two-player mode, where one player controls *Ulala*'s movements while the other controls the buttons. How could you not love it?

Space Channel 5 Special Edition isn't going to win any awards. But at 30 bucks, you could do a lot worse—like, say, buy 20 copies of *BMX XXX*.

Greg Sewart



SPHINX AND THE CURSED MUMMY

Publisher: Virgin

Developer: Virgin

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: T

Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy feels less like a coherent product and more like the fusion of two disparate games. It's not as obvious a Frankenstein job as, say, *From Dusk Till Dawn* (which literally felt like two movies slapped together around an arbitrary middle). *Sphinx* does a decent job of integrating the two protagonists and their separate journeys into a cohesive story—but while one of the stories is an incredibly clever yarn, the other is simply standard fare.

The game starts with a young, wry Sphinx—before, evidently, he became the old curmudgeon with the splinter in the foot and a propensity for telling riddles—claiming the Blade of Osiris before hotshot sends him off to lift Set s



Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy



Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy

curse from Heliopolis. Sphinx probably went to the same school as Link, as he runs, double-jumps, climbs, and slashes with ease. He spends his half of the game fighting foes, righting wrongs, and retrieving rarities, and also occasionally revels in minigames that suspiciously resemble *Simon Says* and *Memory*.

Alas, while the *Sphinx* portion offers standard action-adventure fare, it's bogged down by a sticky camera and the lack of an auto-lock, so fighting multiple foes in confined spaces (a frequent occurrence) gets annoying. The camera keeps on getting stuck in corners, making it hard to keep track of everything.

Tutankhamen, the aforementioned Cursed Mummy, is easily the better half of the game. Because he's dead already, the designer's could craft devious (and eminently more interesting) puzzles that call for flattening, slicing, burning, or electrocuting him. The multiple abuses inflicted upon poor Tut both amuse and endear him to us. Because Tutankhamen has no combat skills (or even a uebar!), there's less annoyance with the camera—you're not often in fast-paced situations that require excellent camera control. The game could use a little more variety with regard to Tut's "death" animations, but he still easily outshines his co-star. Heck, the game should have been called "*The Cursed Mummy*, and some guy named *Sphinx*".

Basically, we have a four-star Cursed Mummy game held back by a three-star *Sphinx* game, bringing the overall game average to three-and-a-half.

Thierry Nguyen



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No matter what, *XIII*'s fundamental visual aesthetic is nigh irresistible. One can't help but be entranced by the cel-shaded figures, the comic-book panels, and the rampant homomorphosis. With this much style oozing from the game, it seduces me to find it wrapped around something so average.

There are many things, besides the look, one can appreciate in *XIII*. The narrative itself—fusing elements of the Kennedy assassination, pseudo-Freemasons, and the amnesiac-assassin formula—is actually interesting. While there are still quite a few traditional cutscenes, the use of first-person flashbacks (complete with hurried whispers) creates a better feeling of immersion.

The three-panel replay of your latest head shots, being able to shoot while moving a body, and the tendency to use human shields (perhaps an older *XIII* teaches Sam Fisher that trick) all help make *XIII* feel like a super-agent. And the compelling narrative, arresting visuals, and the "my golly, I really am badass" protagonist make for great hooks. But those expecting great innovation or gameplay in the FPS formula might be disappointed.

For all of the glossy veneer *XIII* sports, it's covering a straightforward shooter. There's quite a bit of run 'n' gun, along with the occasional stealth level. In fact, not only are you captured and rendered weaponless early on, but you get captured and thrown into prison again. The missions, even when utilizing stealth, all feature variations of "go to point B" and "find/use the key." Oddly enough, there's a Skills menu that lists such things as "dual weapon" and "silent walk," yet these are things that are assigned to you, not things you develop yourself.

Although the enemies are smart in realistic ways (calling for backup, actually looting weapons and ammo off of corpses), they're also smart in artificial ways. One wonders if they are using the same mythical magic bullet that Lee Harvey Oswald used, since they can snay you quite accurately with even a shotgun. If you're not



some sort of FPS *bon vivant* who can naturally pop off head shots with aplomb, then you might find yourself a tad frustrated at these soldiers. The multiplayer mode is passable; the PS2's exclusive Power Up mode is puzzling at first—until you realize that it only really randomizes the weapon spawns and adds some, well, power-ups to the mix. It's not bad, but it's a little overwhelming.

As fantastic as the production values are in this game, David Duchovny's contribution is lacking. His extraordinary dearth of vocal tonality and invective ranges from passable to ridiculous. While Eve is merely passable, we salute Adam West's performance as the gruff authority figure who you inevitably follow.

Sadly, *XIII*'s gameplay is too pedestrian; strip away the gorgeous visage and you have a typical shooter with some good tweaks. Perhaps things will improve when the inevitable *XIV* (or *XIII-II?*) comes along.

Thierry Nguyen



XIII

A graphic novel that is graphic, but not so novel

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Ubisoft Montreal MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Mature

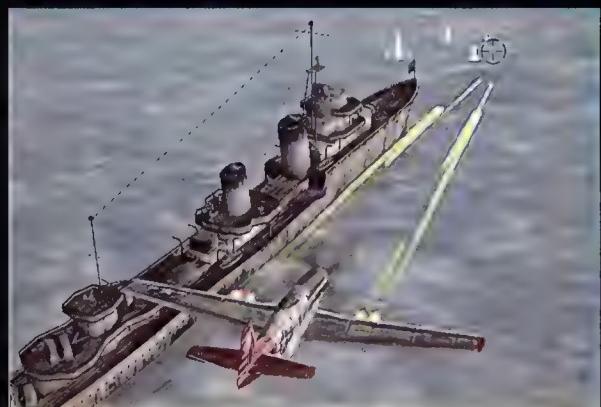
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SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

All action, all the time

Publisher: LucasArts

Developer: Totally Games

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Teen

SWON is not a flight sim. It's not really a flight-combat game in the same vein as *Ace Combat* either; it's a simple third-person shooter that has you flying a wide variety of missions in a broad selection of historically accurate aircraft. You just point your plane in the direction you want to go and shoot...and that's all you need to worry about. Sometimes you're shooting, and sometimes you're bombing, but mostly it's chasing bad guys and blowing them out of the sky. If the pace isn't right, you can even speed up time to make chasing Jerry quicker, or slow things down so you can hold him in your sights more easily. You don't even have to "earn" this like some lame "bullet-time" feature; it's always available, and always welcome.

The varied missions have you nailing the Bosch on escort duty, blowing up his ships, chasing down his bomber squadrons, blowing up buildings and generally causing mayhem. You'll pass yourself off as a sausagescooter as you sneak into Nazi airspace in one of their own planes, and you'll gradually acquire a squadron of 20 aircraft, including some experi-



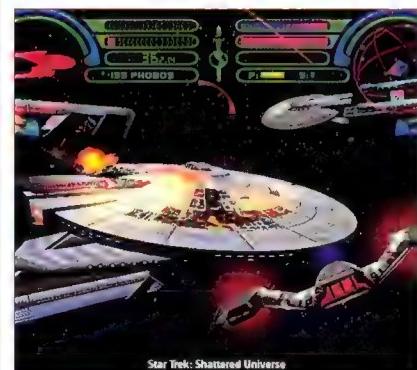
mental goodies. All of them are satisfying to fly, and there's an upgrade system that provides the necessary sensation of progress through the 30 campaign tasks. The emphasis is on capturing the adrenaline of dogfighting and air-to-ground combat, and the variety of tactics keeps the boredom at bay. Some of the missions are way too tough, but there's plenty of eye candy to keep you happy while you work out how to hunt the Hun successfully.

Special note must go to the presentation: The graphics are great throughout—but it's the music that's a real wowzer. Composed by Michael Giacchino and performed by the Northwest Sinfonia, the soundtrack evokes the period perfectly.



Extra fun points also go to the two-player mode. While an online mode would have been appreciated, in splitscreen you can choose dogfighting or an interesting "competitive" co-op mode where you can replay the campaign with a pal. It's fun stuff, and it acts as a pleasant bonus once you've beaten the meat of the game.

John Davison



Star Trek: Shattered Universe

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

Publisher: TDK MediaWorks

Developer: Starphase

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: Everyone

Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Excalibur*. Its mission: to finally give us a *Star Trek* game that doesn't totally suck.

Shattered Universe goes the extra mile to get us out of the squeaky-clean *Star Trek* story-line by dropping the player into an alternate reality where the Federation doesn't exist (though, surprisingly, all the same characters and vessels do) and Federation shuttle craft have been transformed into fighters. OK. So far, so good. I can dig a good *Colony Wars*-type space-combat sim.

As a lighter pilot on Capt. Sulu's *Excalibur*, you face off against the regular cast of Klingons and Romulans, as well as a few other alien baddies, and yes, even the alternate *Enterprise*. In other words, this alternate universe is pretty half-assed, though Trekkies (is that the proper term?) will be stoked to see decent renditions of their favorite *Trek* ships trading phaser fire on the screen.

But venturing out of the shuttle bay and into deep-space dogfights offers up pretty lukewarm action on First and foremost. Phasers just aren't exciting weapons for a game like this. They might look cool on television, but when I'm dueing with enemy craft, I want something a bit more satisfying to fire up his tailpipe. To be fair, each ship has a button for photon torpedoes and a more conventional secondary phaser weapon, but it still just doesn't feel meaty enough to me.

And what's with each craft being stuck in gear? You can't come to a dead stop in this game. You're

either going forward, a bit faster forward, or backward. There's no way to set your speed, which means there's no way to match velocity with a target, which is just stupid. What I'm trying to say here is that the controls are broken. I want a larger selection of weapons and better control over my speed before I take on these alternate-reality gongs.

In short, *Shattered Universe* just doesn't deliver. The onscreen action never heats up enough to be considered exciting, and even if it did, the shoddy controls scheme would keep it from being any fun anyway. Additionally, tracking more than one target is more than the HUD can handle, and it's full of gauges that aren't clearly labeled, leading to more than a few hiccups during the heat of battle.

Mission Failed

Greg Sewart



Star Trek: Shattered Universe



Star Trek: Shattered Universe



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HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

Not quite sports, not quite anything else

Publisher: EA Games

Developer: Electronic Arts UK.

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

In building a game around Harry Potter's favorite sport, EA has made some fairly interesting choices. Instead of throwing you face first into a very fast-paced, often confusing, and frankly, bizarre sport, you're forced to complete a set of simple training challenges before you even get into your first match. As you learn the basics of the game, you'll have opportunities to challenge the other houses of Hogwarts. Beat them all and you can represent the country of your choice against the rest of the world.

This is good in that it gives younger players something of a kiddie pool in which to build up their skills before jumping into the "real" game. But for anyone who's ever played a soccer or basketball game (Quidditch is in some ways a blend of the two, only played, you know, on broomsticks), these first challenges will be almost pitifully simple. I had exactly one goal scored against me in the entire Hogwarts section, and I'm not remotely a sports guy.

The flip side is that once you move into the World Cup, the matches seem insanely difficult by comparison. You'll need to use every technique you've been taught in order to succeed.

And that's harder than it sounds, considering you're playing in a 3D environment with no real control over speed or alti-

tude; the game controls these for you in a way that's sometimes utterly incomprehensible. Oh, and forget about being able to pick your player; the game shifts control to key positions on its own schedule. If you're chasing the guy with the Quaffle and he gets away from you, you can't switch to a closer player. You can't even speed burst.

On top of that, teams can score via unlockable special moves presented via unskipable cinematics, further diminishing any feeling of control. In other words, if you're expecting something approximating a real

sports game, you'll be somewhat disappointed.

On the other hand, if you're expecting more of a story, you'll also be disappointed. So in the end, *Quidditch World Cup* falls into pure novelty territory: it's fun for a few hours or as a nice diversion for two-player matches. Hardcore Harry fans will want it for their collections; the rest of us will marvel at the fact that it really is just like the books...and then go play something else.

Joe Ryzicki



TAK & THE POWER OF JUJU

Publisher: THQ

Developer: Avanade

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

Like so many efforts to make a new franchise for kids, *Tak* suffers from sometimes trying a little too hard. Whereas THQ's work with Nickelodeon on the new *SpongeBob* game is a great case study in how to get it right, *Tak* proves the partnership can come unstuck too.

Neither the story nor the structure is going to win any awards for originality. There are some mildly amusing gags involving sheep, but the game centers on collecting stuff. Lots of stuff. I guess it's what you'd expect from this kind of game. Collect a bunch of one kind of thing to activate a quest, then collect a bunch of other stuff to make something else happen, and while you're collecting that stuff, collect magical stuff too—oh, and

while you're at it, collect a bunch of other stuff too for good measure. We've seen it in *Jak*, in *Crash*, and every other game in the genre, and when it's not compensated for with other elements, it just doesn't work. There's nothing particularly original here, so the whole thing is riding on its charm—and its fun factor—of which *Tak* has very little.

After a few hours, the boredom sets in, and the number of reasons you have for wanting to beat the damn thing is less than one. It's just not fun enough. Sure, it has its moments, but the game isn't always consistent with its mission. It's cute and desperately trying to be hip, but on the other hand, it's occasionally excruciatingly difficult. Its intended audience will no doubt get frustrated.

I know I did.
John Davison



Tak & the Power of Juju

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Playing *Beyond Good & Evil* is like being on vacation: the game is suffused with a joy of discovery that's similar to the sensation you get when visiting a new place and experiencing new things. French developer Michel Ancel (he's *le homme* behind *Rayman*) has created a rich world that pushes far beyond the boundaries of his game, lending a depth and weight to everything that happens. Despite the whimsical nature of the varied critters that inhabit Hyllis, everyone (and everything) feels so real that you might just forget you're playing a game.

It's a thrilling achievement—and it's reason enough to try this title. *BG&E* has an awesome vitality stemming from the abundance of life that spills out of every corner of its world. From the tiniest detail to the largest creature, *BG&E* overflows with energy.

Plus, *BG&E* has the gameplay to back up all this high-falutin' mumbo jumbo. (Well, mostly—there are a few serious issues, but we'll get to that in a bit.) An adventure in the classic mold, *BG&E* is full of labyrinthine

puzzles, sprawling exploration, quick action, fun (but not too challenging) racing, a smattering of combat, lots of sneaking around, and some keen cooperative bits with your cohorts.

The game's neatest part, though, is the photography—especially the way it's integrated into all aspects of the experience. You play as Jade, an action reporter who gets caught up in an underground attempt to reveal the truth behind alien attacks, rampant abductions, and the corrupt Alpha Section, a military unit that's supposed to be protecting the Hyllians. In order to do so, you'll have to uncover evidence of foul play, photograph it, and submit it to the rebel newspaper. Meanwhile, you've also been commissioned to snap photos of every living creature as a project for a scientist who wants to document every species before they're possibly destroyed. With these two elements in mind, snapping pics becomes a great gimmick for moving the story along, as well as an involving side quest and, most of all, a terrific way to connect with the world around you.

Unfortunately, you'll be rudely pulled out of this otherwise immersive experience, courtesy of a few nasty glitches. The worst offender: the framerate. Although it never renders the game unplayable, the framerate often chunks up enough to make it extremely unpleasant to do what you need to do most—explore your environment. Just panning the game camera around a small enclosed area can sometimes be an eye-gouging chore. It's especially hard to take since *BG&E* doesn't seem to be doing anything PS2 can't handle.

The control could also use

some refinement. Button placement is somewhat awkward (I can't count the number of times I readied my camera instead of running from something), and the combat isn't responsive enough. While these problems are significant enough to mar what should have been a brilliant release, *BG&E*'s fundamental gameplay is so appealing that it's supposed to be.

Gary Steinman



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Beyond good gameplay, with some really evil glitches

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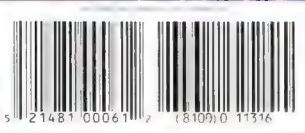
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ESPN NBA BASKETBALL

Publisher: Sega Sports

Developer: Visual Concepts

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

It's scary just how good Visual Concepts is becoming with this whole professional basketball thing. The company's latest game, *ESPN NBA Basketball*, represents the pinnacle of the sport in videogame form with its nearly flawless gameplay and wide assortment of modes.

It includes an online option that shares many of the features found in its NFL counterpart, like online leagues. But perhaps one of the most entertaining aspects of this year's game is the 24/7 mode.

It's a little different from the standard modes in other basketball games because it doesn't focus on a specific team. Or even the NBA for that matter. Instead, you have to build up a name for a custom player by training and participating in different street-ball-style events across the country, which range from basic 1-on-1 matchups to games with special stipulations that must be fulfilled in order to progress. Beating some players lets you call them down the road when you need a partner for a 2-on-2 game. 24/7 almost feels like a basketball RPG, and it never fails to suck you in for a few good hours, despite your best efforts to play just one quick game.

The good of 5-on-5 action isn't exactly a slouch, either. Everything—including the post-up game, jump shots, dribbling moves, and rebounding—has been executed almost perfectly.

However, there are some lingering issues with passing and the fast break. While the overall game has been sped up ever so slightly,

it's still pretty hard to execute a clean fast break, for example, partly because players tend not to run far enough ahead of the pack and also because the passing just isn't as crisp and responsive as it should be. There are still a few instances, though, that allow you to run to the basket unopposed for a monstrous dunk.

Like in previous games in the series, the commentary is still top-notch, as are the graphics, which have received a small upgrade in the form of flowing jerseys (finally!) and new player animation that helps give the game a much more natural look.

There's just so much to like about *ESPN NBA Basketball* that any basketball fan—casual or hardcore—would be deemed insane for even considering passing it up.

Giancarlo Varanini



NBA JAM 2004

Publisher: Acclaim

Developer: Acclaim

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

Undoubtedly sparked by the popularity of Electronic Arts' *NBA Street*, Acclaim decided to resurrect *NBA Jam*. But after spending some time with the latest incarnation, it's become clear to me that the series should've stayed dead and buried. The problem isn't the basic gameplay mechanics, which really haven't changed that much since the original *NBA Jam*, but rather some of the new features that magnify some of *NBA Jam's* inherent faults.

The main culprit is the hot-spot feature. After charging the jam meter by performing a variety of dunks and moves, you can execute a hot-spot dunk that initially gives three points automatically but increases by one point each time the jam meter is charged. This feature works well as incentive for being fancier with the ball, but it's even more effective as a cheap tool for incredibly abusive rubberband AI.

The computer is absolutely relentless when you have the lead. It'll steal the ball the second you throw it inbounds or moments after moving the ball up the court. Either way, this usually means the computer's jam meter will charge rather quickly in the process, resulting in a hot-spot dunk and the subsequent evaporation of the lead in a matter of seconds.

It just isn't fun. And since most of the cool extras can be accessed only in the single-player modes, you'll have to deal with it. Of course, you could always buy *NBA Street Vol. 2* instead.

Giancarlo Varanini



NBA LIVE 2004

Publisher: EA Sports

Developer: EA Sports

MSRP: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone

Any basketball coach will tell a team that it can't win a championship without good defense. Taking this lesson into consideration, EA Sports has significantly beefed up the defense in *NBA Live 2004*, turning it into a much more accurate representation of professional basketball than its fast-paced predecessor. No longer can the ball be passed carelessly around the perimeter, since defenders are much smarter about jumping into passing lanes to knock the ball away or even to steal it. In fact, passing the ball into the post usually results in a double team that occasionally forces you to make a bad pass.

Even the perimeter defense has been improved. It's much more difficult to burn a defender using the game's excellent freestyle controls, which enable you to perform a variety of spectacular ball-handling maneuvers simply by moving the right analog stick. Defenders are also noticeably more adept at performing switches on picks, making it harder to run to the basket for a layup or a dunk.

There are plenty of other enhancements that make *NBA Live 2004* one of the best games in the series. The two different shot types—one for layups and dunks and the other for outside shots—add a new dimension to the game, since they can be used strategically, depending on the defensive situation. The layup or dunk shot makes it easier to draw fouls when you're inside the paint, while the regular jump shot can be used as a safety in case you're not close enough to the basket or it looks like you might get an

offensive charge call.

Just about every facet of *NBA Live 2004* has been refined, including the game's different modes. The Dynasty mode is more robust, with player-training options and additional information that helps you make better decisions on player transactions. In addition, online play now features tournaments that can support up to 64 teams and official EA Sports tournaments.

What ultimately makes this game stand out? The gameplay has been dramatically tweaked, but the changes haven't detracted from the quick and responsive pace of the previous game. If you want a healthy mix of simulation and arcade elements, then you really can't go wrong with *NBA Live 2004*.

Giancarlo Varanini



**NBA SHOOTOUT 2004**

Publisher: Sony CEA

Developer: 989 Sports

MSRP: \$39.99 ESRB: Everyone

It's too bad the *ShootOut* series has always taken a backseat to other basketball games, considering that it has often introduced features eventually stolen by other development teams. But because those innovative features were often poorly executed, very few people actually cared. Fortunately, *NBA ShootOut 2004* has been subject to much refinement, and while it still can't compete with the competition, 989 Sports has created a surprisingly solid all-around basketball game.

ShootOut 2004 still has some of the signature problems that have plagued the series for a while. On the lower difficulty settings, defenders too often back down from the ball handler, making it easy to walk the ball right through the paint for a short jumper or layup. Shot percentages are also a little off, so in some cases, it's easier to hit a three-pointer as opposed to a 5-foot jumper.

But, in general, the game's defense has been substantially improved. Careless passes—especially wild jump passes—often result in turnovers, and if the ball handler isn't careful, the ball can easily be stripped away. Likewise, attempting a halfhearted shot with a defender's giant mitt in your face usually means the ball will rattle off the rim. These are things any self-respecting basketball game should have, but they still serve as proof of how much *ShootOut 2004* has improved.

Another bright spot is the game's online play. Like *NFL GameDay 2004*, *ShootOut 2004* offers a full-featured online mode complete with message boards,

e-mail, tournaments, and special team affiliations that almost act as leagues. The fact that it's all contained within the *ShootOut* environment and not on a website is quite impressive, and it works quite well. The Franchise (aka Career) mode is also worth mentioning, simply because of its unique approach: You essentially guide a player on a path to build a professional career, which includes the summer league and the basketball equivalent of the minor leagues.

There's no question that you should go with *ESPN Basketball* or *Live* when making the decision to buy a basketball game this year, but if for some crazy reason *ShootOut 2004* is the only game you're able to purchase, it certainly wouldn't be a total loss.

Giancarlo Varanini



OCTOBER 2003.
IT'S COMING.



FINAL FANTASY:
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www.advfilms.com



ZO TFT Universal GameScreen



ZO TFT Universal GameScreen

ZO TFT UNIVERSAL GAMESCREEN

Manufacturer: Modtek

MSRP: \$199.99

I lost count of the number of times some variant of the following comment occurred while I was testing the GameScreen.

"Oh Lord, not another—holly crap, that looks awesome!"

Seems like everyone wandering through my cube had to stop and stare at this ungainy device perched atop my PS2. And just about everyone was amazed by how crisp the screen is, how vibrant the colors are, and how easily the image can be seen from sharp angles.

For 200 bucks, it certainly ought to be turning heads. Unfortunately, a few other things I'd expect to go along with that \$200 price tag seem to be missing.

For example, I can't argue with the 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio, with more and more games supporting widescreen, that's a welcome feature. However, the lack of a proper 4:3 mode for games that don't support widescreen is, in my opinion, an almost unforgivable omission. Even great-looking games look silly when all the characters appear bloated.

Furthermore, with some games, the image seemed either washed-out or oversaturated, with no in-between. This wouldn't be as much of a problem if the screen had controls beyond Brightness and Color.

Still, it's an otherwise well-designed product, and while 200 bucks is a lot of cash, it's only \$50 more than the GameScreen's vastly inferior competitors. If you're in the market for such a screen, you could do much worse.

Joe Rybicki

PS1 Quick Hits



FORD TRUCK MANIA

Publisher: Gotham Games

Developer: Alpine Studios, Inc.

MSRP: \$99.99 **ESRB:** Everyone

It was a rare opportunity for me to drive the finest Ford pickup 1932 had to offer. It wasn't much of an experience, and *FTM* ain't that much of a game. Pedestrian at best, *FTM*, even with a track editor, doesn't truck very far. —T.N.



TALL: INFINITY

Publisher: Ageless

Developer: Hamster

MSRP: \$99.99 **ESRB:** Everyone

Did we learn from those wacky folks in Babel that building a tower to infinity isn't such a hot idea? With God himself frowning on the notion, Hamster should have realized that its bizarrely bad puzzle was cursed from the start. —G.S.



Wireless Net Extender

WIRELESS NET EXTENDER

Manufacturer: Nyko

MSRP: \$99.99

What a great idea: Turn a proprietary wireless format into a compact, stylish form factor. Make it so plug-and-play simple that your grandmother could figure out how to use it. Then sell it in a matched pair for an extremely reasonable price. That's the *Wireless Net Extender* in a nutshell.

You want easy? Unplug your broadband cable from the back of your PC and plug it into the WNE's base unit. Run another cable [included] from the base unit back to your computer. Take the remote unit over to your PS2 and connect it to your Network Adaptor with another cable [also included]. Turn everything on and presto—you can take your PS2 as far as 100 feet from your broadband connection and maintain a solid connection to the Internet. And when you want to

go online with your PC again, just flip the switch on the base unit to Computer and you're there.

It has a few drawbacks compared to setting up a legitimate wireless home network. You won't be able to go online with your PC and your PS2 at the same time, for example. You won't get quite the same range or quite the same transfer speeds, either. And it's not as cheap to expand: You'd need to buy a pair each time.

But brother, for 100 bucks, it's the cheapest wireless solution you'll find anywhere. I figured it was too good to be true...but then I fired up SOCOM and suffered practically no lag beyond a few initial stutters. It'll never be as fast as a wired connection—and the 1.5Mbps transfer speed is barely a tenth of the speed of Wi-Fi—but for \$100, it's fast enough.

Joe Rybicki



PS2 Hardware



CHAMELEON WIRELESS

Manufacturer: Pelican

MSRP: \$349.99

It's a bargain-priced wireless pad with a fairly solid feel and a pretty nifty gimmick: It's packaged with a tiny R/C car like the ones that were all the rage last holiday season. Unfortunately, the buttons and sticks are so sensitive that it's hard to play with much precision. —J.R.



EXTREME ACTION

Manufacturer: Logitech

MSRP: \$349.99

Something about this leather-trimmed controller feels remarkably comfortable. Unfortunately, the analog sticks appear to have an insanely tiny neutral zone, so you'll need to lower the stick sensivity in games that support it. Too bad so many games don't. —J.R.



Wireless Net Extender

SOUL CALIBUR II UNIVERSAL ARCADE STICK

Manufacturer: Nuby

MSRP: \$399.99

If you take your fighting games seriously, there are cheaper, sturdier, and less-ugly arcade sticks available, but there aren't many that work with every system. This one at least is kinda clever.



USB HEADSET

Manufacturer: Sony CEA

MSRP: \$299

The extra-large earpiece makes this headset comfortable as all get out, and the volume control is an absolute godsend. My only complaint is the Mute button: Its location makes it way too easy to hit accidentally. Otherwise, trade on up, you'll be glad you did. —J.R.



TIME CRISIS[®] 3

TIME IS NOT ON YOUR SIDE

An innocent nation is facing annihilation. And time's moving faster than a 9mm slug. So grab your weapon of choice, line up the sights and keep your partner at your back. You're going to need all the firepower you can get.

timecrisis3.namco.com



Insanely fast duck and shoot GUNCON[®] 2 action.



New Weapon Select System lets you toggle between multiple weapons.



3 modes of play to keep the bullets flying long after the story's done.



Violence

GUNCON[®] 2

PlayStation[®] 2





REPLAY

We make you rock
at your games.

PS2 TRICKS AND REVIEW ARCHIVE

Game names in **green** indicate a Greatest Hits title.
Ratings in red indicate a five-star score. A number
1 indicates its rank in the top-selling games for
each system.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
hack//INFECTION	Banda	*****	65
hack//MUTATION	Banda	*****	69
hack//OUTBREAK	Banda	*****	73

PAY ATTENTION TO MAGAZINE ADS

If you haven't seen them yet,
you might have missed a
secret keyword code. Here
it is... just for you! Abusive
False Tragedy



188 JAK II

Let slip your naughty dogs of war
We know this game is hard, so we
had Naughty Dog tell us exactly what
you need to do to get past the 10
hardest spots in the game.

INSIDE REPLAY

190 Soul Calibur II

We asked, and you told us! Beating out the
likes of Mitsuogi and Nightmare, Voldo was
the most requested character, so here he is.

192 SSX 3

We got help from Prima in showing you all
the coolest tricks, how to pull them off, and
where the heck stuff is on the mountain.

PS2 Games

- 194 Castlevania: Lament of Innocence
- 195 Simpsons: Hit & Run
- 187 Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando
- 201 Reader Reviews
- 198 Rewind

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
18 Wheeler American Pro Trucker	Acclaim	*****	52
4x4 EVO	GOD Game	*****	44
2002 FIFA World Cup	EA Sports	*****	58
Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	Irem	*****	51
Activation Anthology	Activation	*****	64
Aero Elite: Combat Academy	Sega	*****	67
The Adventures of Cookie & Cream	Arcene	*****	44
Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	*****	59
Airblade	Namco	*****	53
Aliens Versus Predator Extinction	EA Game	*****	72
All-Star Baseball 2002	Acclaim	*****	44
All-Star Baseball 2003	Acclaim	*****	56
All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	*****	67
Alter Echo	THQ	*****	73
Amplitude	Sony CEA	*****	68
Antz Extreme Racing	Empire	*****	61
Ape Escape 2	Ubisoft	*****	70
Aqua Aqua	3DO	*****	42
Art the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	Sony CEA	*****	70
Arctic Thunder	Midway	*****	50
Armored Core 2	Agetec	*****	39
Armored Core: Another Age	Agetec	*****	48
Armored Core 3	Agetec	*****	61
Army Men: Air Attack	3DO	*****	44
Army Men: Green Rogue	3DO	*****	45
Army Men RTS	3DO	*****	56
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	3DO	*****	45
ATV Offroad Fury	Sony CEA	*****	42
ATV Offroad Fury 2	Sony CEA	*****	64
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	Acclaim	*****	66
Auto Modellista	Capcom	*****	69
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	*****	52
Barbarian	Titan	*****	57
Bass Strike Virtual Fishing Tournament	THQ	*****	51
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	*****	74
Batman: Vengeance	Ubisoft	*****	51
Battle Engine Aquila	Atari	*****	65
Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	*****	71
Black & Brushed	Majesco	*****	67
Blade II	Activation	*****	62
Blood Omen 2	Eidos	*****	57
BloodRayne	Majesco	*****	63
Bloody Roar 3	Activation	*****	47
BMX XXX	Acclaim	*****	65
Bomberman	Capcom	*****	72
Breath of Fire Dragon Quarter	Capcom	*****	67
Britney's Dance Beat	THQ	*****	58
The Bouncer	Square EA	*****	42
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Stern/Fox	*****	73



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WHIPLA

Castlevania
Three more whips for you!

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HIT/RUN!

Simpsons Hit & Run
Where the gags at? Here

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REWIND!

Week in December 2001
Best and worst in 12/9/01

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GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Burnout	Acclaim	*****	52
Burnout 2 Point of Impact	Acclaim	*****	63
Burn-Ugly Martians: Zoom or Doom!	Crave	***	73
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	Activision	****	67
16 Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season	Activision	****	74
WHY WHY WHY? Why'd you lose this game? Our only tip is not even play it in the first place. And to think that nice copies of this game were sold than Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution. For shame.			
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	*****	51
CART Fury	Midway	*	47
Casper: Sprint Dimensions	TDK Mediactive	*****	50
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	*****	74
Chaos Legion	Capcom	*****	70
Chessmaster	Ubisoft	*****	70
Choplifter Crisis Shield	Xcar	****	69
City Crisis	Tekko	****	48
Clock Tower 3	Capcom	*****	68
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	*****	48
Commandos 2 Men of Courage	Edios	**	62
Conflict: Desert Storm	Gotham Games	*	63
Conflict: Desert Storm II	Gotham Games	*****	74
Conflict Zone	Ubisoft	*****	63
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	*****	64
Cool Boarders 2001	Sony CEA	*****	46
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	Universal	*****	51
Crazy Taxi	Acclaim	*****	46
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	*	74
Dark Angel: Vampire Apocalypse	Metro3D	*	49
Dark Cloud	Sony CEA	*****	46
Dark Cloud 2	Sony CEA	*****	66
Dark Summit	THQ	*****	54
David Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	*****	50
DKRMAX	Konami	*****	63
DKRMAX 2	Konami	*****	74
Like dancing in real life, all we can say's practice, practice, practice. That training mode is there for a reason.			
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	*****	39
Dead to Rights	Namco	***	65
Def Jam Vendetta	EA Sports Big	*****	67
Defender	Midway	*****	62
Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Edios	*****	56
Devil May Cry	Capcom	*****	50
Devil May Cry 2	Capcom	*****	66
Dino Stalker	Capcom	*****	61
Disaster Report	Age tec	*****	65
6 Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atari	*****	72
WANT AN EASY WAY TO LEVEL UP?			
Go to the Cave of Trials, stage 3—lots of good XP and since all the enemies are on a 3x3 grid, any 3x3 attack will kill them quickly.			
Disney Golf	EA Games	*****	61
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision	*****	73
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	Ubisoft	*****	63
Disney's Treasure Planet	Sony CEA	*****	64
Donald Duck Goin' Quackers	Ubisoft	*****	42
Downforce	Titus	*	57
Downhill Domination	Sony CEA	*****	71
Dr. Muto	Midway	*	63
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	Atari	*****	65
Dragon Rage	3DO	*	54
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates	Sony CEA	*****	53
Driven	Bam	*	52
Driving Emotion Type-5	Square EA	*****	41
Drome Racers	EA Games	*****	64
Dropship	Bam	*****	57
Dual Hearts	Atari	*****	61
Dynasty Tactics	Koei	*****	61
Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei	*****	76
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	*****	38
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	*****	52

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Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atari	*****	72
WANT AN EASY WAY TO LEVEL UP?			
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Disney Golf			
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure			

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Donald Duck Goin' Quackers	Ubisoft	*****	42
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Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei	*****	76
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	*****	38
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	*****	52

LOCKED CHEST IN AL BED HOME:	You usually need to find all the Al Bed books to transalte the chest and figure out the code. You can skip all that by typing in S633. You get a nifty sphere.		
Finding Nemo	THQ	*****	71
Flameblade	Midway	*****	59
Fisherman's Challenge	Konami	*****	67
Forever Kingdom	Age tec	*****	53
Formula One 2001	Sony CEA	*****	50
Freaky Flyers	Midway	*****	72



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HIT/RUN!

Simpsons Hit & Run
Where the gags at? Here

198

REWIND!

Week in December 2001
Best and worst in 12/9/01

RATCHET & CLANK 2: GOING COMMANDO

Homegrown tips straight from Insomniac

PLAN IT OUT
Fighting on Planet Xanadu is a challenge, so here are some hints to help you out. If you're looking for a specific location, like the Power Cell or the Power Cell, just type in its name and it'll bring you right to it. If you're looking for a specific item, like the Power Cell or the Power Cell, just type in its name and it'll bring you right to it.



ARMED AND DANGEROUS
When fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight. If you're fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight.



HEAVY LOAD
The Heavy Lance is a great weapon for getting through the Glitchin Arms Arena. If you're fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight. If you're fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight.



THE BOUNCE
In the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight. If you're fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight.

2-UP
To defeat the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight. If you're fighting in the Glitchin Arms Arena, try to avoid being hit by an enemy with the Glitchin Gun. If you do get hit, you can still continue the fight.



JAK II

The 10 most difficult moments and how to get past them

Jak II may very well be one of the most difficult action-platform titles ever released—so, where better to go for expert strategy than to the guys who made it? We asked Naughty Dog to list Jak II's 10 toughest challenges and how to get past them.

1) BLOW UP AMMO AT FORTRESS

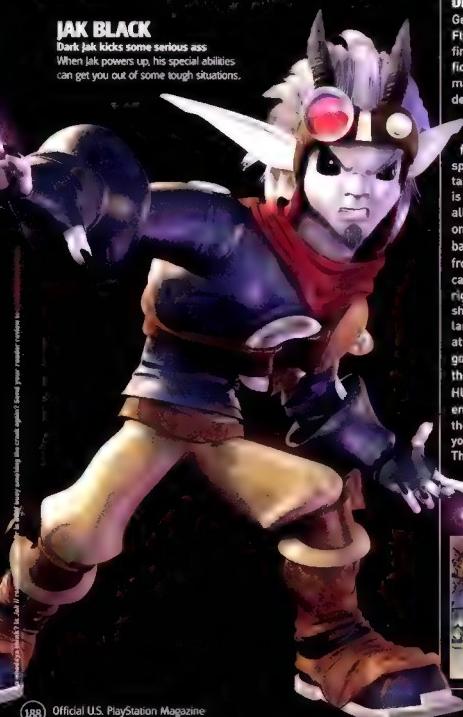
The most difficult part of this mission is getting through the first section, where the camera changes to the view of the tank chasing you. It can really throw off your depth perception. First, you need to get used to moving Jak around in this new view. There isn't really any tactic for learning this—just practice.

After that, the best way to make it through this section is to lure the tank into firing a stream of rounds in one spot so that Jak can jump away from it. Stand in one spot, watch for the tank's targeting reticle to lock on, and then roll out of the way and move past whatever obstacle is in front of you. Do this before you try to jump over a pit and get caught midair or land in a stream of rounds, because the tank follows your movement. Repeat this until you reach the next section and always be prepared to jump.



JAK BLACK

Dark Jak kicks some serious ass. When Jak powers up, his special abilities can get you out of some tough situations.



4) DESTROY SHIP AT DRILL PLATFORM

Getting through the wave of Flying Krimzon Guards in the first gun turret is the most difficult part of this mission. The most obvious tactic here is to destroy them before they get within firing range of you.

The most common reason for failing this section is spending 10 seconds trying to take out the single enemy that is closest to you. Why waste all that time trying to target one enemy when you have a barrage of five more coming in from the other side? In a lot of cases, that one enemy will fly right in front of your melee of shots while you're firing at the larger incoming group. Pay attention to everything that is going on around you, not just the arrow in the gun turret HUD that detects the closest enemy. If you continuously fire the turret, it will overheat and your fire rate will decrease. Three more things: Strafe, Strafe, and STRAFE!!!



2) COLLECT MONEY FOR KREW

The most difficult part of this mission is keeping your bike from being blown up. You'll need to go through the mission a few times to learn where all the money bags are. When you collect one, slow down a bit and look for the next one on your minimap.

Stay low and run over the Krimzon Guards whenever possible so that they don't shoot at you when you're passing by. Also, plan to switch vehicles at least once. (It's extremely difficult to make it through using just one vehicle.) Practice switching vehicles in midair; this technique will help you avoid losing the time you need to get to the next money bag.

5) HUNT HAVEN FOREST METAL HEADS

The most difficult part of this mission is making it through without dying. There isn't an abundance of health crates to help you out with this one, so come into this mission with full health. There are plenty of health crates in the mountain area before you enter the forest.

There are two ways to spot a Camouflaged Metal Head: one is his beady little glowing eyes, and the other is his huge, glowing Metal Head Gem. So, you're strolling along, taking out Camouflaged Metal Heads and collecting Metal Head Gems, feeling pretty confident that you've made it halfway through with only half your life gone, when BAM—you run into one, he shoots, and you're dead. No problem—you just have to do it again more carefully this time, right? Wrong. The only clue to the location of the Metal Heads you already killed are those beady little glowing eyes, because you already collected their Metal Head Gems. So, you really want to try to make this mission in one go. Four tips will help with this mission:

- 1) Attempt to get through in one pass
- 2) Autotargeting weapons help a bit
- 3) Try to start this mission during the night, because it makes it easier to see the glowing parts of the Camouflaged Metal Heads
- 4) Don't stand still—you will get hit.



3) DESTROY EQUIPMENT AT DIG

The most difficult part of this mission is dealing with the Krimzon Guards' deadly accuracy. There are two ways to approach this mission. The first is to go directly after the support cables. Although fun, this is effective only if you play through the mission a bunch of times and know where all the routes go. The easier of the two methods is to take out all the Krimzon Guards, then go back at your leisure and attempt to take out the support cables without the fear of being knocked off. You must use your hoverboard to grind the rails grounding the support cables. Be very careful around ledges—it's easy to fall to your death there.

CRASH BASH: WHAT HAPPENED?!

Naughty Dog was no longer in control of the Crash franchise. Jason Rubin referred to that moment as Crash's "fat Elvis period."



CTH-CRASH TEAM RACING
Naughty Dog's incredibly fast-paced car racing game is finally here! Check it out on either PS2 or PC.



6) GET THE SEAL PIECE AT THE WATER SLUMS

This is a difficult mission in general; it gives affirmation to the old adage, "Slow and steady wins the race." Don't try to rush—take your time and slowly move forward as you shoot the guards. Try to kill them in a manner that makes them die on the dock so that you can collect the ammo they drop. Watch your minimap for guards moving in from other directions. It's easiest to keep the camera focused in the direction you're moving and to shoot back toward the direction of the incoming guards—that way, you can keep a constant eye on what's ahead of you. Try not to rush up on the drop ships—they have laser guns that don't miss. Just stay back and take out the guards being dropped off until the ship flies away. Then move forward and collect the ammo. Make sure you know which way you're going so that you don't end up at a dead end and have to come back through a new set of enemies. The easiest way to do this, other than learning the layout of the docks, is to look at your map and then watch yourself on the minimap to make sure you're going in the right direction.

7) DESTROY FIVE HELLCAT CRUISERS

The easiest way to complete this mission is to take out a Hellcat Cruiser and then hide until the alarm goes off. Grab the ammo by Torn's Hideout, jump in a two- or three-seated vehicle (they can take more damage), and slowly head toward one of the Hellcat Cruisers without hitting any Krimzon Guards or their vehicles. We don't want to set off the alarm early.

Now, nudge up against the back of the Hellcat Cruiser; it won't take off or start shooting if you're only nudging against it. Once you start shooting at the Hellcat Cruiser, it's going to try to make a run for it. Make sure you can take it out before it gets away or starts turning on you—avoid having to chase it down. Now, open up and destroy it. Once the Hellcat Cruiser is destroyed, make your way to an alleyway or a cove in the city and hide until the alarm goes off. Then grab another vehicle and proceed as before until the mission is complete.



8) ESCORT MEN THROUGH SEWERS

This mission has three difficult parts. They aren't too tough by themselves, but the fact that they happen to be the last three sections and you've most likely taken damage (with no health crates along the way) makes them much more daunting. After descending on the second lift and traveling down the hallway, you'll come to the first difficult task. As you approach the corner that rounds to the right, three Metal Heads will begin firing their lasers. Watching the pattern and entering the laser mesh at the right time will beat this. Jump in and continue to jump forward, avoiding the beams while firing an autocorrect weapon, and you'll take them out.

Directly after defeating the Metal Heads, you'll see three more lasers coming from around the corner to the left. The easiest way to defeat them is to get on your JET-Board and jump over the beams toward the steel grate ramp directly in front of you, which leads to the other side of the pipes. Then, flank them from their left side. Don't get caught in the beams while on your JET-Board, though, or you'll be mincemeat.

Just after passing this section, the last of the rubble-clearing bombs is set—which is when the fun begins. The walls seem to be crawling with Metal Heads coming from all directions.

The best way to defeat this section is to stay close to the men you are defending. If you move too far away from them, the Metal Heads will drop in behind you, and that will make it even tougher to beat. You can use any weapon you want, but the most effective plan is to have full Scatter Gun Ammo ready when you get there. This, of course, hits multiple targets at once and blows the Metal Heads back away from the men you're defending. You don't want them to get much closer than just over the lip coming out of the water before you run forward a bit and blow them all back. Any closer and they'll start to use their lasers.

After blowing back the Metal Heads, run back toward the men. Continue this process until they are all defeated.



9) BEAT KREW IN WEAPONS LAB

The easiest way to avoid getting hit by the Mini-Krew apparitions is to keep moving in one direction around the platform. Stay to the outside so that you don't get caught up on anything and take out the crates as often as possible to get more ammo—they will respawn. Don't stand in one place for too long, or you'll be surrounded and get hit.

A set number of apparitions will spawn before you get to take on Krew himself. Krew has a three-step life meter, and you get to take out each section only after defeating a set of apparitions. The easiest way to defeat this level is to use the Scatter Gun on the Mini-Krew apparitions while you're moving around the platform to keep them as far away from you as possible. During the fights with Krew, use any weapon except the Vulcan Fury Gun. Krew has a high tolerance for this weapon. Watch the gun above Krew's head—it always lights up just before it shoots. If you time it right, he may get off only one shot before you let him have it.

10) DESTROY METAL KOR AT NEST

We're not going to show you a pic of this; the boss is extremely cool looking, and we want our guide to be spoiler free. This is, of course, one of the toughest missions, and rightly so. There are three stages to this mission.

Throughout all the stages, taking out Kor is your main objective, but you can't ignore the Metal Heads around you. Take them out first. Try to take them out when they're in egg form, before they hatch, and don't let them overwhelm you in a corner. One of the easiest ways to get away before they get in close is to hop on your JET-Board and ride around the ring away from them. This is also the easiest way to get ammo from the crates while avoiding getting hit. Sooner or later, though, you're going to have to get off the JET-Board and face them. Use the Jump-Spin and Shoot combo with the Blaster to take out multiple targets. When you see a lull in the onslaught of Metal Heads coming at you, take a few pot shots at Kor—but make sure you avoid Kor's blasts coming at you. Keep an eye on his head; when it begins to glow, start rolling out of the way. He'll fire one blast in the first stage, two in the second, and three in the third.

During the third stage, shoot at Kor until he gets close, jump on your JET-Board and get away, then jump off and repeat. Watch his head and avoid his blasts. Also, watch out for his Shockwave when he falls to the ground and then jump over it. Good luck!

DAXTER RULES!

Give him his own game!

He might not have much of a role in the gameplay, but Dexter is still the true star of this series. We love him!



SOUL CALIBUR II

Vicious strategies for Voldo

We asked for suggestions on who to spotlight next, and Voldo was the winner. He might be the kindest character, but he's also the most challenging, so here's some help in using him, courtesy of the *Bradygames* guide.

Strengths

Voldo is nothing if not the master of freakiness. It isn't just Voldo's wide range of disturbing costumes, gestures, and actions; this monster has techniques that extend his mind game even further. Voldo can close against foes while crawling on all fours or crab walking, run away from people, or leap around the screen at will. Hissing all the while, Voldo makes it very hard to concentrate on what attack is next in a lineup.

Voldo's damage and ability to control a fight are pretty impressive as well. Many of Voldo's attacks can knock people down and batter them severely, and there are ways to minimize the risks for making these strikes. With a wide assortment of guard cancels, Voldo certainly becomes a useful character for anyone who likes to outsmart opponents instead of using pure instincts... and reflexes.

It's also useful that Voldo has a well-balanced set of launch, juggle, and wakeup skills. Because all of these are effective, Voldo players can mix a wide range of attacks so that victims of a launch have no idea what to expect. Air controlling might put foes in an even worse situation if the Voldo player is one step ahead of them, and that uncertainty makes everything hectic for opponents.

Weaknesses

Although it isn't hard to learn Voldo's basic game, he has a weak point for players who start to learn his higher-level tricks; it takes a bit off of someone's game to start implementing all of Voldo's eccentric moves. Thus, there are times when Voldo slips in power while players adapt and integrate new skills into their routines. This isn't a huge weakness, but it bears mentioning.

If Voldo isn't used to his fullest—in regard to guard cancels, fast recoveries, and

deception—he can seem like a somewhat slow character. Many of the faster characters in the game won't have too hard a time mopping the floor with him if both players try to have a slugfest. Voldo requires a sense of tactics; people who rely solely on speed and a quick response to problems won't get the most out of him.

There are so many exotic moves in Voldo's list that his players often try for attacks that aren't safe. This is hard to resist because Voldo is fun to play with a reckless air. Crawling around on the floor and leaping onto people's heads won't work too often, but trying for these attacks and hearing opponents' reactions is worth the difficulty.

Path to Mastery

Because Voldo is such an interesting character to control, it takes a while before players see everything he is capable of doing. This strategy section tries to introduce some of the easier elements of advanced Voldo play before getting into the more treacherous (and rewarding) techniques.

KEY VOLDO ATTACKS

Blade Nail ($\diamond \oplus \ominus$) is a two-hit move that Voldo can use under a wide range of conditions. If the initial hit is ducked, the second attack hits crouching defenders. Blade Nail is one of Voldo's staple moves because it is fast enough to act as a sensible counterhit against most foes. If this attack does connect as a counterhit, continue to add pressure with a low attack, perhaps using a Calistro Rush move called Snake Eater (during Calistro Rush, $\ominus \oplus \ominus$, or Scorpion Tail [$\ominus \ominus$] to land a mid-launcher.

Demon Elbow ($\diamond \ominus \ominus$) is a fast charge into a midattack that is intended to stop aggressive oppo-

nents during a wanton rush. Although difficult to use in the middle of existing combos, Demon Elbow is fast enough to get Voldo into attack range against slow, long-range characters that want to play keep-away games.

Blind Drop ($\diamond \ominus \ominus$) covers territory quickly as well, hitting mid twice and putting both Voldo and his victim on the ground on a successful hit. A simple Blind Drop Kick (During Blind Stance, $\ominus \ominus$) straightens Voldo out and slaps any victim who doesn't defend against a low attack before getting up. Roll away from the opponent for Voldo to get into a more useful position, then consider using Blind Dive ($\ominus \oplus \ominus$) if foes try to come forward too soon. Mix this with a more complex midstrike after training people to stay low. For example, attack with Blind Drop, then go into Mantis Crawl when Voldo rises into his Blind Stance position (Blind Stance, $\ominus \oplus \ominus$ to Mantis Crawl). From there, attack with Asylum Breakout (Mantis Crawl, \ominus).

Scorpion Tail ($\diamond \ominus \ominus$) isn't limited to use after a counterhit. Indeed, this launcher is reasonably quick for what it does, and its animation is odd enough to complicate matters for beginners and veterans alike.

Blind Blade (\diamond or \oplus) is safe on block and acts as a very sensible move to deal with fast charges when Blade Nail just won't be fast enough. After connecting, Voldo is in a good position for flowing into another attack. Mix successes with fast low attacks and powerful mids:



BEST BLIND FIGHTER EVER IS...

Zatoichi, a legendary blind swordsman from ancient Japan.

gets a nod of approval for use in these scenarios.

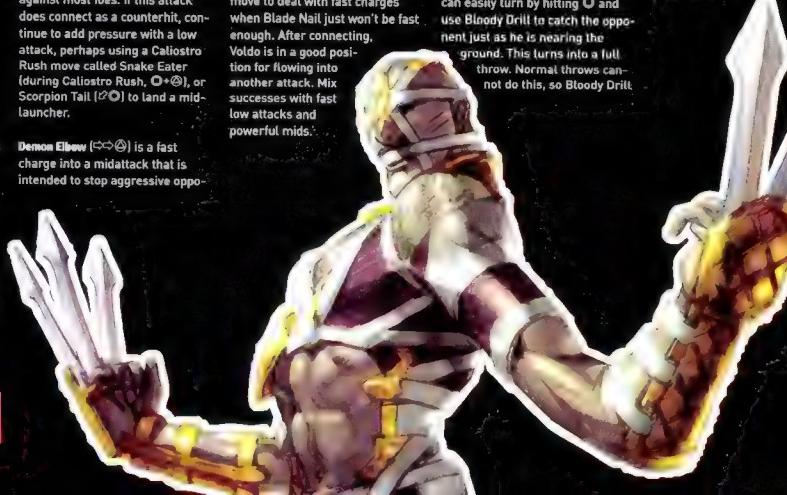
The following combo requires a successful counterhit to succeed, but the final damage tally is worth the initial setup time. From an existing crouch, use Scorpion Claw (White Rising, \ominus) and follow a counterhit with Mad Shredder ($\diamond \oplus \ominus \ominus \ominus$).

GETTING AROUND

Although very hard to master, an option is to input $\diamond \oplus \ominus$ when Voldo first enters Blind Stance to run away from opponents. This works if quickly entered at the end of an attack that naturally sends Voldo into another Scorpion Tail or a Praying Mantis ($\diamond \oplus \ominus$).

To avoid confusion, after an opponent expects these attacks, delay a moment after a future launch and use Evil Bow ($\ominus \oplus \oplus$). If this hits after the opponent has landed and started to rise, the victim is plowed back onto the ground. This is a nice mix-up to hurt anyone who wants to make a Quick Recovery and counterattack.

Bloody Drill ($\ominus \oplus \ominus$), one of Voldo's interesting throws, has an element of abuse potential during launch games. After hitting a target with a light juggle (even a simple \ominus or \oplus), Bloody Drill has a chance to catch opponents before they completely landed. The easiest example of this is done when an opponent is near the wall. After a Scorpion Tail, Voldo can easily turn by hitting \ominus and use Bloody Drill to catch the opponent just as he is nearing the ground. This turns into a full throw. Normal throws cannot do this, so Bloody Drill



KEY: D-PAD

Hollow Arrow = Tap, Solid Arrow = Hold

SSX 3

Metro-City and Uber tricks

Boost Bar

The Boost bar will quickly become your new best friend. Without it, you simply won't win. Worse, you won't be able to make it over jumps high enough to pick up big multipliers, point icons, and collectibles, and shortcuts will essentially be invisible.

Don't get too worried, though. Simply do big tricks to fill up your Boost bar. The more tricks and combos you pull off, the more boost you get, eventually filling the bar, which allows you to go into an Uber state.

In an Uber state, not only do you have cool trails of snowboarding power flowing from you, can you pick up bigger points and pull off some amaz-

ing moves. Fill the letters U-B-E-R, and you move into a Super Uber state. Fill S-U-P-E-R, and then you can pull off some really crazy moves called Monster tricks. But don't think those are easy to pull off—in fact, it's quite complicated to even get these.

BOOST BAR STATES

- * Empty: Clear
- * Full: Red
- * Level 1: White
- * Level 2: U-B-E-R complete
- * Level 3: S-U-P-E-R U-B-E-R complete
- * Monster tricks: Win these via Career Highlight completion (or accidentally do them if you're extremely lucky).

Tricks, Uber Tricks, and More

Consider these general notes on tricks before we get down and dirty:

- * Tricks are the same for each character except for signature moves called Super Uber tricks
- * Prewind for spins by holding \triangle and pressing in whatever direction you want to spin
- * Don't just grind on rails and logs—Uber grind! It gives you more points and looks pretty darned cool
- * When an event starts, push off from the gate to go faster. Do this simply by pressing Up right before the timer hits zero.

* Don't do the same tricks over and over during a combo because repeated tricks score lower.

* Balance your rail slides and handplants with the left analog stick. Not only does this help you keep combos going, it can change your direction while sliding or doing a handplant, which often helps you find new areas.

* Uber tricks are worth more than regular tricks, and Super Ubers are worth more than Ubers. Monster tricks are worth the most.

* Uber tricks are available only when you're in Uber Boost mode; likewise, Super Ubers are only available in Super Uber Boost mode land because Monster tricks always involve a Super Uber trick, thus also applies to Monster tricks.

* Keep this equation in mind: Tricks = points = money. Specifically, 500 points equals \$1. However, there's a cap. When you hit 10,000 points and above, you get a flat \$20. Sure, it doesn't seem like much, but it adds up quickly, and before you know it, you'll be making thousands of dollars just by practicing! If you're looking for quick cash, transport to one of the Super Pipes and go for a Free Ride. Those back-to-back big airs add up really quickly.

BASIC TRICKS

You'll need to know how to pull off the basic moves. But come to think about it, we use the term "basic" lightly. After all, you can combine any of the grabs below with forward and backward flips,

not to mention spins, Uber tricks and Super Ubers. For instance, to do a frontflip Stalefish, you would jump and hold R1 while pressing forward on the D-pad.

Remember, too, that Monster tricks are combinations of a Super Uber with one of the moves listed below. All of this makes the following list indispensable.

TRICK LIST

Trick name	Buttons
Stalefish	R1
Method	L1
Indy	R2
Mute	L2
Tailgrab	R1 + R2
Nosograb	L1 + L2
Melancholy	L1 + R1
Swiss Cheese	L2 + R2
Lein	R1 + L2
Shifty	L1 + R2
Chicken Salad	R1 + R2 + L1
Spaghetti	R1 + R2 + L2
Stalemashky	L1 + L2 + R1
Seabett	L1 + L2 + R2
Shifty	L1 + (L2 + R2) + R1 + R2

UBER AND SUPER UBER TRICKS

Here are all of the Uber and Super Uber tricks in the game. For those listed as level 1, you simply need to have the Boost bar filled. For those listed as level 2, you need to have U-B-E-R spelled out. Then you can move onto Super Ubers, but keep in mind that not all Super Uber tricks are available at the start. You purchase level 3 Super Uber tricks at each of the Lodges on the three peaks. In addition, you can customize which Super Ubers tricks you have access to at a given time.



LEGEND

- Single Stage Big Challenge
- Multistage Big Challenge
- Collectible Snowflake



TRUXX PRIME WEEKEND

This neat map and the tricks list were
both courtesy of the Prime Guide for SSX 3.

STALEFISH

Name	Buttons	Level	METHOD	Name	Buttons	Level
Springer	R1 + ○	1	Reach Around	L1 + ○	1	
Tricky Flicky	R1 + ○	1	Mahogany	L1 + ○	1	
G-Money	R1 + ○	2	Jib-O	L1 + ○	2	
Superman	R1 + ○	2	Indian	L1 + ○	2	
Smithereen	R1 + ○	3	Hand in Hand	L1 + ○	3	
Torpedo	R1 + ○	3	Kort Martial	L1 + ○	3	

INDY

Name	Buttons	Level	MUTE	Name	Buttons	Level
Extended Play	R2 + ○	1	Clean Sweep	L2 + ○	1	
Can Opened	R2 + ○	1	Counter Point	L2 + ○	1	
Matrikulator	R2 + ○	2	Bar Hop	L2 + ○	2	
Karolicker	R2 + ○	2	SSKordist	L2 + ○	2	
Judo	R2 + ○	3	dnl.	L2 + ○	3	
Element	R2 + ○	3	Katana	L2 + ○	3	

Career Highlights

Career Highlights are specific tasks you need to complete in order to obtain Monster tricks. 24 Highlights to finish means 24 Monster tricks to obtain. It doesn't matter exactly where you accomplish these Highlights, except that it's best to consider the trick type you have to pull off, and then pick an appropriate course. For example, it might be best to pick a Slopestyle course over a Race course if you want to try rail sliding for 10 seconds, because there are so many rails on a Slopestyle course.

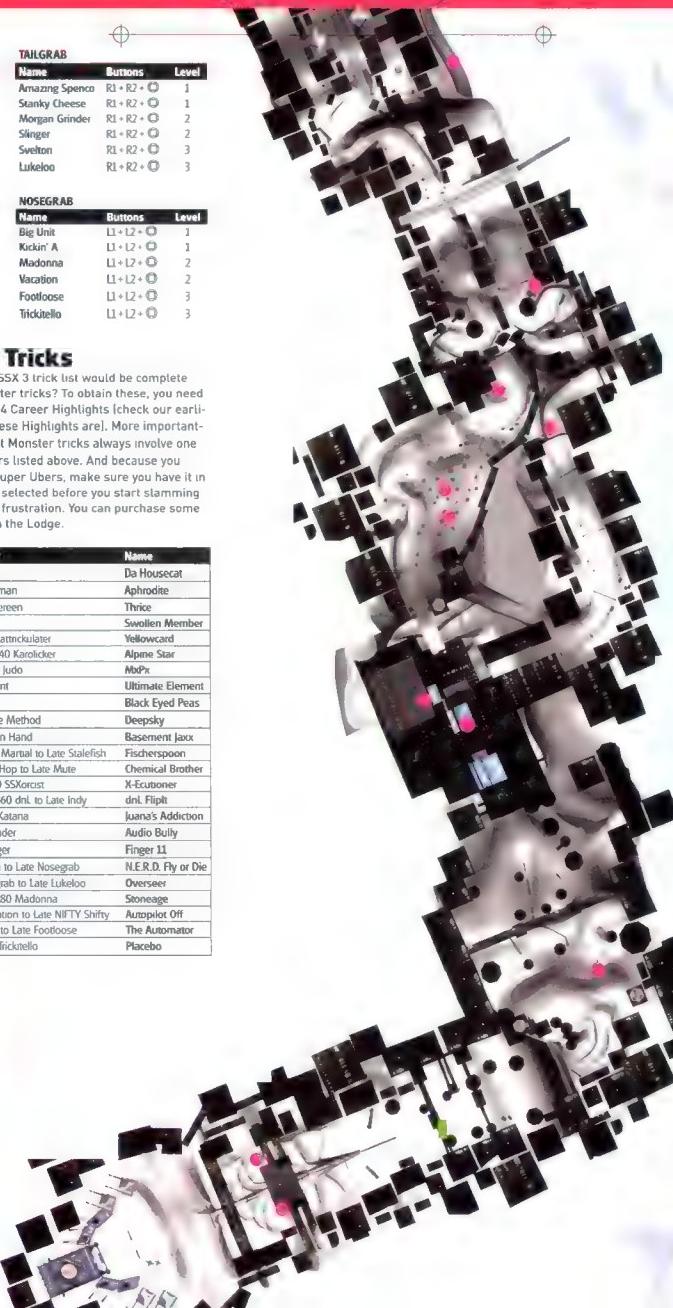
Task	Award
Stay on a rail for 25 meters	Da Housecat
Stay on a rail for 120 meters	Thrice
Stay on a rail for 300 meters	Swollen Member
Hold a handplant for 3 seconds	Yellowcard
Hold a handplant for 5 seconds	Alpine Star
Hold a handplant for 8 seconds	MoPx
Stay in air for 5 seconds	Aphrodite
Stay in air for 8 seconds	Ultimate dnl BOOST
Stay in air for 10 seconds	Deepsky
Knock down 3 people in a race	Fischerspoon
Knock down 6 people in a race	Basement Jaxx
Knock down 10 people in a race	N.E.R.D. Fly or Die
Do 5 Uber grinds in 1 event	Finger 11
Do 8 Uber grinds in 1 event	Autopilot Off
Do 10 Uber grinds in 1 event	The Automator
Do 5 Ubers in 1 event	Black Eyed Peas
Do 8 Ubers in 1 event	Placebo
Do 10 Ubers in 1 event	Overseer
Get 150,000 in 1 event	Chemical Brother
Get 500,000 in 1 event	Ultimate dnl FLIPIT
Get 1,000,000 in 1 event	X-Ecutioner
Do a 10X combo in an event	Audio Bully
Do a 20X combo in an event	Stoneage
Do a 100X combo in an event	Juan's Addiction

Monster Tricks

And really, what SSX 3 trick list would be complete without the Monster tricks? To obtain these, you need to complete the 24 Career Highlights (check our earlier list on what these Highlights are). More importantly, remember that Monster tricks always involve one of the Super Ubers listed above. And because you must buy some Super Ubers, make sure you have it in your arsenal and selected before you start slamming on the buttons in frustration. You can purchase some of these moves in the Lodge.

Move + Super Uber

Name
FS 540 G-Money
Triple Backflip Superman
FS Rodie J20 Smithereen
BS 720 Topedo
BS 900 Kickin' A Matrikulator
FS Double Backflip 540 Karolicker
Backflip Nosegrab to Judo
FS Rodie J20 Element
BS 900 Jib-O
FS 900 Indian to Late Method
BS Deepsky
BS Misty 900 Hand in Hand
BS Backflip 360 Kort Martial to Late Stalefish
Double Backflip Bar Hop to Late Mute
FS Triple Backflip 180 SSXorcist
FS Double Frontflip 360 dnl. to Late Indy
BS 720 Indy to Late Katana
FS 1080 Juan's Addiction
BS Backflip 360 Slinger
FS Misty J20 Slinger to Late Nosegrab
Triple Backflip Nosegrab to Late Lukeloo
Double Backflip 180 Madonna
Double Backflip Vacation to Late NIFTY Shifty
BS 360 NIFTY Shifty to Late Footloose
BS 540 Indy to Late Trickello
Placebo



CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

Finding the three secret whips

You're probably wondering why there are only two whips in the game. Actually, there are five total; three are being held by hidden Elementals. Here's where to find each of these tools, and how to take them down and claim some whip goodness.

Fire Elemental

WHERE? Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab.

Get to the second floor, find the main hallway with the save point, then continue east. Go into the room with the long hallway and the moving floor; ride said floor down the center. Use your whip on the golden poles to reach the hidden boss door.

HOW? Use the Whip of Ice, duh. If you don't have that handy, you can use your trusty Whip of Alchemy. When attacking the Fire

Elemental, use combo attacks that emphasize the Triangle button—he can block most attacks that use the Square button. The tricky thing with this guy is that he first uses a string of heavy slashes that will break through your normal block. You have to pull off a perfect block in order to repel these attacks. Since the timing of a perfect block is tricky, we suggest just running the heck away, and maybe jumping, to avoid these swings. Occasionally, he'll switch to one big slash, which you can easily run around. Then you can hit him from another position. He follows up his slash attack with a jumping flame attack—he jumps in the air and smashes his sword into the ground, causing flames to speew up. You can usually block the flame, but instead, you should actually try to hit him when he's recovering from the attack—it's an obvious pause in his pattern. Put the hurt on him and you'll eventually earn the Whip of Flames.

Ice Elemental

WHERE? The Dark Palace Of Waterfalls.

First, go to the Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab and get the Wolf's Foot relic. It's behind a door for which you'll need the Red Phoenix key, which is near the courtyard area in the Garden Forgotten By Time. The Wolf's Foot relic will make it much easier to reach the room you need to get to. In any case, make your way past the skull ride and into the series of Y-intersections. Go to the Y-intersection near the

start point and head southeast. Eventually, you'll be in a room where there's a cutout of a door on the wall. In order to open this wall, wait for the Heavy Armor to take aim with his mace. Dodge it at the last second and his mace will crash through the wall. Once you're in that room, you need to use creative jumping and whipping to make your way up the ledges. The last ledge at the top is the one for which you'll want the Wolf's Foot relic; otherwise, good luck running, jumping, and whipping your way up there. Once you get to the top, you'll be at the hidden boss door.

HOW? Hopefully, you'll have the Whip of Flames (or maybe you're fighting the Ice Elemental first, to make fighting the Fire guy easier). Like the other two, the best time to hit her is either when she's recovering from pulling off a big attack or when she's charging up for a big attack—after she charges up her arm and runs at you, while she's standing still and charging up her laser, after she shoots the ice crystals, or after she sends out a shockwave. Try to evade her attacks, as most are not blockable, and the shockwave in particular will paralyze. Eventually, you'll get the Whip of Ice from her.

Lightning Elemental

WHERE? Garden Forgotten By Time.

Work your way to the second room, where there's a Man-Eating Plant (it'll be north of a room fea-

turing a Mist and a Shadow Wolf). Whip said plant until it's under the ledge in the northeast corner of the room. Use the plant to get up onto the ledge and get into the next room. Hit both levers (behind the statues) and you'll see that the door in the wall has a platform underneath it. Jump to the platform and get through the door before the platform disappears again. In the next room, use your whip to latch onto a lightning pole, then work your way across the platforms to the southern door. Go through, ascend the tower, and in the next room, whip the statue in the east hallway after this room is the hidden boss door.

HOW? Thunder is probably the toughest of the three Elementals; in fact, he's resistant to the two other Elementals' whips, so don't bother arming them. Instead, use Ax- or Knife-based attacks. Like the Fire Elemental, this guy likes to jump into the air and slam his dual-sword thingy onto the ground, creating a lightning explosion. Run around and attack him from behind, like you did to the Fire Elemental. Again, like the Fire Elemental, he'll use a series of slashes; avoid them if you can. He's also vulnerable when he charges at you; you can dodge this and hit him from behind as he slams into a wall. He also likes to stand still and zap lightning from his sword. Dodge all of these lightning blasts and keep hitting him whenever he does either the jump or the charge attack, and you'll earn the Whip of Lightning.



Strike while the iron is hot!



Cool her down with your slick moves.



Charge at him when he's charging up.

THE ENTHUSIAST ALPHABET (WORLD MILITARY FORCES USE AS CODEWORDS)

Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu

GAMES

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
NCAA College Football 2K3	Sega Sports	★★★	60
NCAA Final Four 2001	Sony CEA	★★	41
NCAA Final Four 2002	989 Sports	★★	52
NCAA Final Four 2003	Sony CEA	★★★	64
NCAA Football 2003	EA Sports	★★★	48
13 NCAA Football 2004	EA Sports	★★★★	48
TOUCHDOWN CELEBRATIONS	If you wanna be like those boys in the NFL and do a little dance (maybe make a little love?) whenever you score a touchdown, just press the following button combos whenever you see "touchdown" onscreen.		
L2+O	Player spikes the ball, points to crowd, then beats his chest		
L2+X	Player bows to the crowd		
L2+O	Player spikes the ball then shrugs his shoulders		
L2+X	Player does Heisman Trophy pose		
R2+O	Player will dunk on the Goat Post.		
R2+G	Player will punch the ball toward the crowd.		
R2+O	Player will kick the ball into the crowd.		
R2+X	Player will throw the ball to the crowd.		
NCAA GameBreaker 2001	Sony CEA	★★	41
NCAA GameBreaker 2003	Sony CEA	★★	61
NCAA GameBreaker 2004	Sony CEA	★★★	73
NCAA March Madness 2002	EA Sports	★★★	53
NCAA March Madness 2003	EA Sports	★★★	64
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	EA Games	★★★★	62
1-2-3-4-5-6	Sega Sports	★★★★	52
NFL 2K3	Sega Sports	★★★★	60
NFL Blitz 20-02	Midway	★★★★	55
NFL Blitz 20-03	Midway	★★★★	60
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway Sports	★★★	74
NFL GameDay 2001	Sony CEA	★★	40
NFL GameDay 2002	Sony CEA	★★	53
NFL GameDay 2003	Sony CEA	★★★	61
NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA	★★★	73
NFL Quarterback Club 2001	Acclaim	★★★	50
NHL 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	38
NHL 2002	EA Sports	★★★★	50
NHL 2003	EA Sports	★★★★	63
7 NHL 2004	EA Sports	★★★★	73
Our resident hockey expert is busy being Canadian at the moment so we don't have any tricks or codes for you NHL heads. Maybe you can help your fellow readers out by writing to opm@ziffdavis.com with some pointers.			
RRH 2K3	Sega Sports	★★★★★	64
NHL FaceOff 2001	Sony CEA	★★★★	43
NHL FaceOff 2002	Sony CEA	★★★	64
NHL HitZ 20-02	Midway	★★★★	51
NHL HitZ 20-03	Midway	★★★★	62
NHL HitZ Pro	Midway	★★★★	73
Ninja Assault	Namco	★★★	61
No One Lives Forever	Sierra	★★★★	56
Okage: Shadow King	Sony CEA	★★★★	53
Oni	Rockstar	★★	43
Halo: Combat Evolved	Capcom	★★★★	43
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	★★★★	60
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	★★★★	60
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	Activision	★★★	39
Pac-Man Fever	Namco	★★	60
Pac-Man World 2	Namco	★★★★	54
PaRappa the Rapper 2	Sony CEA	★★★★	53
Pans-Dakar Rally	Acclaim	★★	53
Pirates: The Legend of Black Kat	EA Games	★★★★	55
Portal Runner	3DO	★★	50
The Powerpuff Girls: Relish Rampage	Bam	★★	65
Pondo FC	THQ	★★★★	65
Primal	Sony CEA	★★★★	68
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	★★★★	65
Project Eden	Eidos	★★★	52
Pyrmz Chapter One: The Dark Uncon TDK Medicave	THQ	★★★	60
PTO IV	Koei	★★★	66
Q-Ball Billiards Master	Take 2	★★★	40
Quake III: Revolution	EA Games	★★★★	44
Rally Fusion Race of Champions	Activision	★★★	64
Matchers & Clash	Sony CEA	★★★★	63
Rayman 2: Revolutions	Ubisoft	★★★★	43

GAMES

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	★★★★	67
Rayman Arena	Ubi Soft	★★★★	57
RC Revenge Pro	Acclaim	★★★	41
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing Round 2	Midway	★★★★	40
Red Pool	Infogrames	★★★★	40
Red Card Soccer 20-03	Midway	★★★	57
Red Faction	THQ	★★★★	66
Reel Fishing III	Natsume	★★★★	72
Reign of Fire	Bam	★★★★	63
Resident Evil: Code: Veronica X	Capcom	★★★★	48
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	Capcom	★★★★	70
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR	Activision	★★★★	71
Rez	Sega	★★★★	59
Ridge Racer V	Namco	★★★★	38
Riding Sprites	Bam	★★★★	61
Ring of Red	Konami	★★★★	63
Risk: Global Domination	Atari	★★★★	73
RKT Run Like Hell	Interplay	★★★	62
Road Kill	Midway	★★★★	74
Road Trip	Conspiracy	★★★★	61
Royal Horseman of the Crown	Capcom	★★★	79
Rocky	Ubi Soft	★★★★	64
Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	★★★★	63
Robotek: Battlery	TDK	★★★★	62
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VII	Koei	★★★★	60
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VIII	Koei	★★★★	73
RPGs Maker 2	Ageless	★★★★	74
RTX Red Rock	LucasArts	★★	71
Rugby	EA Sports	★★★★	48
Rugby 2004	EA Sports	★★★★	73
Rumble Racing	EA Games	★★★★	45
Rune: Viking Warlord	Tale 2	★★★	48
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	★★★★	64
Salt Lake 2002	Eidos	★★★	55
Savage Skies	Bam	★★★★	56
Scooby-Doo: Night of 100 Frights	THQ	★★★★	58
The Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian	Universal	★★★	62
Shadow and Destroy	Conspiracy	★★★★	66
Sega Bass Fishing Duel	Sega	★★★	62
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega Sports	★★	62
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega Sports	★★★★	60
Shadow Hearts	Midway	★★★★	52
Shadow of Destiny	Konami	★★★★	43
Shadow Man: 2nd Coming	Acclaim	★★	57
Shadow Man's Pro Snowboarder	Activision	★★	52
Shifters	3DO	★★	58
Shunshi	Sega	★★★★	63
Sierra's Palms Pro Snowboarder	Sega	★★★★	62
Shifter	TDK Mediative	★★★	64
Shrek Super Party	Konami	★★★★	69
Silent Hill 2	Konami	★★★★	50
Silent Hill 3	Konami	★★★★	71
MORE SHIRT SWITCHING			
Other Ziff Daws mags also got special Silent Hill 3 shirts in the game			
Enter these codes for these other fine publications			
EGM EGMPreparer	GMR/GMRowntree		
Silent Line: Armored Core	Ageless	★★★★	70
Silent Scope	Konami	★★★★	39
Silent Scope 2	Konami	★★★★	69
Silent Scope 3	Konami	★★★★	62
Working Designs	★★★★	40	
3 The Simpsons Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	★★★★	72

GAMES

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Did You Know? There's a secret car in every level! Our personal favorite is in level 2. Go to the monorail station and make your way to the top. Hop in the front monorail. Sing the monorail song while you're at it!			
The Simpsons: Road Rage	EA Games	★★★	52
The Simpsons: Skateboarding	EA Games	★★	64
The Sims	EA Games	★★★★	65

REPLAY

FORUM

SILENT HILL 3

Yes, it succeeds in being scary, but near the end, Vincent and Claudia were making the game more and more silly. I also, have a question: Were you able to unlock the fairy in the sewer water? I keep trying but it won't work.

July Hizon
www.yourcreation@yahoo.com

We thank you for the fairy that helps you unlock a secret weapon. Unequip the steel pipe and you'll have the option to throw it into the water.

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS

I just got SOCOM as a Greatest Hits (cheaper, and will last me until I can get enough money to get SOCOM II), and I heard that there are secret commands you give only through the headset. What do I gotta say for these cool treats?

Mike Bahn
Los Angeles, CA

Hey Mike, here are some of the secret phrases you can say to get things done right in SOCOM:

"Bravo defense bomb," Say this after planting your crosshairs on a bomb, and, well, bravo, the bomb is defused.

"Bravo open door," Say this after pointing your crosshairs at a door and it'll get unlocked in a jiffy.

"Team low profile," Say this and your team gets all nice and starts stealthily capping foot soft and right.

GAMES

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Sky Gunner	Ataris	★★★★	58
Sky Odyssey	Activision	★★★★	40
Steed Stom	EA Big Picture	★★★★	55
Sky Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	Sony CEA	★★★★★	62
Smash Cars	Menlo3D	★★★★	71
Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament	Namco	★★★★	56
Smuggler's Run	Konami	★★★★	52
Soccer America: International Cup	Rockstar	★★★★	48
Soccer Mania	EA/Lego	★★★★	59
9 COMON: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony CEA	★★★★★	60

UNLOCK LEVEL SELECT: Beat the game on the Lieutenant Junior Grade rank to unlock the Level Select option.

UNLOCK THE MULTIPLE GRENADE LAUNCHER: To unlock the MGL (Multiple Grenade Launcher) just beat the game three times.

USE TERRORIST WEAPONS: Beat the game with an Ensign rank.

Soldier of Fortune

Majesco ★★★

4 End Callout II

EA Games ★★★★

PLAY AS LIZARDMAN: Finish subchapter 2 in Weapon Master mode.

Then you can be a freaky lizard man!

Soul Reaver 2

Eidos ★★★

Space Race

Infogrames ★★★

Speed Kings

Acclaim ★★★

Spider-Man

Activision ★★★★

Splashdown

Infogrames ★★★

Splashedown: Rides Gone Wild

THQ ★★★★

SSK: Wiley

EA Sports Big Picture

SSK 3

EA Sports Big Picture

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"Team low profile," Say this and your team gets all nice and starts stealthily capping foot soft and right.

EDDY After completing Arcade Story Battle with Christie select Christie and press O

LEE After completing Arcade/Story Battle with Violet, select Violet and press O

PANDA After completing Arcade/Story Battle with Kuma, select Kuma and press O



THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

Animated gags

LEVEL 1

LEVEL 2

LEVEL 3

LEVEL 4

LEVEL 5

LEVEL 6

LEVEL 7



GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Warriors of Mugi & Magic	3DO	***	44
Wave Rally	Eidos	**	53
Way of the Samurai	Bam	****	59
Whirl Tour	Vivendi Universal	**	63
Whiteout	Konami	*	65
Wild Arms 3	Sony CEA	****	62
Wild Wild Racing	Interplay	***	39
Wimblade	Koei	****	43
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	*****	57
Wizardry: Tale of the Forsaken Land	Adus	***	53
Woody Woodpecker Buzz Buzzard Park Dreamcatcher	***	57	
World Destruction League Thunder Tanks	3DO	***	42
World of Outlaws Sprint Cars	Infogrames	****	55
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	*****	67
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6-in-1	Konami	*****	57
World Tour Soccer 2002	Sony CEA	****	53
World Tour Soccer 2003	Sony CEA	****	65
WRC: World Rally Championship	Bam	*****	57
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	Actionvision	**	63
WTA Tour Tennis	Konami	*	57
WWF Crash Hour	THQ	**	68
WWF SmackDown! Shut Your Mouth	THQ	**	64
WWF: Raw & Uncensored: Just Bring It	THQ	*****	53
X-Men: Next Dimension	Actionvision	****	64
X Squad	EA Games	****	38
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	Actionvision	**	69
Xenogenesis Episode 1—Der Wille Zur Macht	Namco	*****	66
XGRA Extreme-G Racing Association	Acclaim	*****	76
Yantra Caballista: Cry Skater	Koei	****	49
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duels of the Roses	Konami	**	67
Zapper	Infogrames	**	64
Z.D.E. Zone of the Enders	Konami	*****	44
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	*****	68

PS1 TRICKS AND REVIEW ARCHIVE

007 Racing	EA Games	***	41
3Xtreme	989 Studios	*	21
40 Winks	GT Interactive	****	28
102 Dalmatians: Puppies to the Rescue	Eidos	*****	41
2002 FIFA World Cup	EA Sports	*****	58
3D Zoo's Little Zoo	Sega	**	11
Ace Combat 2	Namco	*****	1
Ace Combat 3: Electrosphere	Namco	***	31
Aces of the Air	AgeTech	*	64
Action Bass	Také 2	**	37
Action Man Operation Extreme	Hasbro	***	41
Ar Hockey	Mud Duck	***	70
Alkap the Heartless	Crystal Dynamics	***	18
Aladdin in Nasra's Revenge	Sony CEA	**	45
Aleks Lala International Soccer	Rockstar	*	23
Alien Resurrection	Fox Interactive	***	38
All-Star Racing 2	Mud Duck	*	71
All-Star Slammer: D-ball	AgeTech	**	56
Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare	Infogrames	*****	47
Alundra	Working Designs	*****	4
Alundra 2	Actionvision	***	32
The Amazing Virtual Sea-Monkeys Conspiracy	**	66	
American Pool	Mud Duck	*	71
Ammonites: Ten Pin Alley	ASC	***	17
Amorphous: Shattered Reality	Infogrames	**	37
Amphibia	Working Designs	***	24
Apocalypse	Actionvision	***	16
Arc the Lad Collection	Working Designs	****	52
Arcade Party Pak	Midway	*****	28
Arcade's Greatest Hits: Alan Collection 2	Midway	***	7
Arcade's Greatest Hits: Midway Collection 2	Midway	**	4
Armored Core	Sony CEA	****	3
Armored Core: Master of Arena	AgeTech	***	31
Ammonites Project S.W.A.R.M.	Acclaim	*	35
Army Men 3D	THQ	***	24
Army Men Air Attack	Sega	*****	27

17. Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution

PLAY AS DURAL	Sega	*****	11
Reach the Sega Area Uptown stage in Quest mode and purchase Dural from the shop. Then, highlight the top-left blank corner space of the character-selection screen in Versus mode to choose Dural.			
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	*****	11
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Actionvision	*****	70
Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam	***	74
War Jetz	3DO	***	48
Wax of the Monkeys	Sony CEA	*****	64
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warmer	THQ	***	74

1881

The year in which Giuseppe Esposito, the first Sicilian Mafia member to emigrate to the United States, was arrested.

LA COSA NOSTRA



Literally translates to 'This Thing Of Ours,' and is the FBI's official name for the Mafia.

GAME PUBLISHER SCORE ISSUE

Army Men: Air Attack 2	3DO ***	39
Army Men: Green Rogue	3DO ***	47
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes	3DO ***	32
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	3DO ***	40
Army Men: World War	3DO ***	34
Army Men: World War - Final Front	3DO ***	45
Army Men: World War - Land, Sea, Air	3DO ***	39
Arthur! Ready to Race	The Learning Co. ®	42
Assault	Midway ***	15
Attack Force	Acclaim ***	14
Atari Anniversary Edition Redux	Infogrames ***	53
Atlantis: The Lost Empire	SCEA *****	48
ATV Quad Power Racing	Acclaim ®	39
ATV Mania	Gotham Games ***	73
Austin Powers Pinball	Gotham Games ***	64
Auto Destruct	Electronic Arts ***	6
Azure Dreams	Konami ***	10
Backstreet Billiards	Asoci ***	15
Ball Breaker	Take 2 ***	36
Ballistic	Infogrames *****	27
Baseball 2000	Interplay ®	21
Bass Landing	AgeTech ***	26
Bass Rise	Bandai ***	28
Batman & Robin	Acclaim ®	13
Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker	Ubi Soft ®	39
Batman, Gotham City Racer	Ubi Soft ®	46
Battle Hunter	AgeTech ®	48
Battleaxe Global Assault	3DO ***	31
Beast Wars	Hasbro ***	5
Beoplayade	Crave ®	66
Big Air	Accolade ®	20
Big Bass Fishing	Take 2 ®	58
Big League Slugger Baseball	AgeTech ®	74
Big Ol' Bass 2	Konami ***	45
Big Strike Bowling	Gotham Games *****	68
Billiards	AgeTech ®	45
Bio-E.R.A.K.S.	Midway ®	10
Black Bass with Blue Marlin	Hot-B ®	29
Blade	Activation ®	41
Blast Lacrosse	Acclaim ***	48
Blast Radius	Psygnosis ***	19
Blaster Master: Blasting Again	Crave ®	38
Blasphemy	Sony CEA *****	8
Blockids	Natsume ***	69
Bloody Roar	Sony CEA *****	6
Bloody Roar 2	Sony CEA *****	21
Blues Big Musical	THQ ***	46
Board Game Top Shop	AgeTech ®	45
Bomberman Fantasy Race	Atus ®	19
Bomberman Party Edition	Vatical ®	38
Bomberman World	Atus ®	13
The Bombing Islands	Kemco ®	47
Boombots	SouthPeak ®	27
Bottom of the 9th '97	Konami ***	1
Bowling	AgeTech ®	43
Brave Fencer Musashi	Square EA *****	15
Bravo Air Race	THQ ***	1
Breakout	Hasbro ®	39
Breath of Fire III	Capcom ***	9
Breath of Fire IV	Capcom ***	40
Brigandine	Adus ***	15
Broken Sword	THQ ***	5
Broken Sword II	Crave ®	27
Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling	THQ ***	13
Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling 2	THQ ***	31
Bug Riders	GT Interactive ®	3
Bugs Bunny & Taz: Time Busters	Infogrames ***	41

As if you really want that blade to keep spinning... here's a trick to prolong this agonizing game. Hit **□** (instead of **△**) when you launch your blade. Whee!

Bugs Bunny: Lost In Time	Infogrames ***	23
Bulder's Block	Jaleco ***	35
Burstrick Wake Boarding!!	Natsume ®	45
Bushido Blade 2	Square EA ***	14
Bust A Groove	989 Studios *****	16
Bust A Move	Square EA ***	17
Bust-A-Move 99	Acclaim ®	19
C Bus Lightyear of Star Command	Activation ®	39
C The Contra Adventure	Konami ®	12
C-22 Final Resistance	Sony CEA ***	36
Caesar's Palace 2000	Interplay ®	41
Caesar's Palace II	Interplay ®	15
Capcom vs. SNK Pro	Capcom ***	60
Card Games	AgeTech ®	50
Cardinal SYN	Sony CEA ***	9
CART World Series	Sony CEA ***	3
Castranova Chronicle	Konami ***	50
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night	Konami ®	2
Cave	Electronic Arts ®	21
Castrol Honda Superbike	Castrol Honda Superbike	22
Centipede	Hasbro ®	22
Championship Bass	EA Sports ***	33
Championship Motocross 2001: Rockin' Carmichael	THQ ®	41
Championship Motocross: Rockin' Carmichael	THQ ***	25
Championship Superstar	Mattel ®	41
Chessmaster II	Mindscape ***	23
Chicken Run	Eidos ®	41
Chesterfield Racing	Square EA ***	23
Chobobo's Dungeon 2	Square EA ***	29
Chobobo's Dungeon 3	Square EA ***	36
Chocobo's Dungeon	Square EA ***	36
Clock Tower	AgeTech ®	2
Clock Tower: II The Struggle Within	AgeTech ®	12
Civilization II	Activision ***	11
Cleopatra's Fortune	Mud Duck ®	71
Clock Town	Asca ***	2
Circuit Breakers	Mindscape ***	12
Civillization	AgeTech ®	11
Cleopatra's Fortune	Mud Duck ®	71
Clock Tower	Asca ***	2
Clock Tower: II The Struggle Within	AgeTech ®	12
Cold Boulders 2	Sony CEA ***	3
Cold Boulders 3	989 Studios ***	14
Cold Boulders 4	989 Studios ***	27
Colonial Wars: Rival Sun	Psygnosis ®	31
Colonial Wars: Vengeance	Psygnosis ®	14
Colonial Wars: Vengeance	Psygnosis ®	14
Colin McRae Rally	Sony CEA ***	30
Colony Wars	Psygnosis ***	4
Colony Wars: Rival Sun	Psygnosis ®	31
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Virgin ®	4
Contender	Sony CEA ***	17
Contender 2	Bam ®	41
Contender 3	Sony CEA ***	3
Contender 4	Sony CEA ***	3
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REWIND

OPM, December 1998



Five years is a long time in the gaming business. Some things remain relatively the same (such as the enduring platformer), while other aspects of the industry change as the years go by. We perused the December 1998 issue to see what was big news and what were the best and worst games at that given moment.

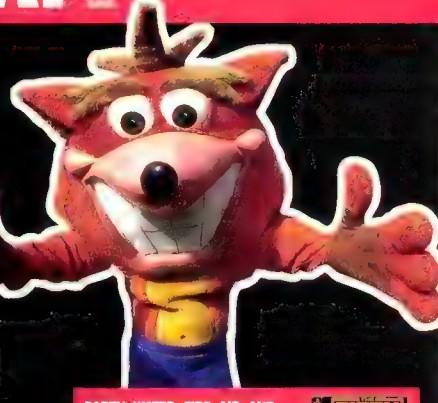
BEST GAME OF THE MONTH

Crash Bandicoot: WARPED earned itself a full five discs, with the proclamation, "If you can't find something you like in this game, you're dead." Great visuals, wide variety of gameplay, and challenging for newbies and veterans, *Crash 3* is a great throwback platformer to boot up whenever you get too pissed off at Jak II.

KILLING THE THRILL

It was back in December when we reported that the "bloodiest game ever" was canned. With the clever headline "Thrill Kill, Dead," we reported on how EA felt that the market wasn't ready for its graphical content, even after being edited down from an AO (Adults Only) rating to an M (Mature). However, anyone who's played a, shall we say, "underground" build realized that the game itself was incredibly crappy.

While the gruesome executions and acts of sodomy were too much for 1998, they might get released nowadays. *Manhunt*, with its graphic depictions of eye gougings and beatdowns, is quite comparable gorewise to *Thrill Kill*. OK, the unscreent sodomy still might not fly, even today. But it's interesting to hear that overly graphic content could cause a backlash in both ratings and the market, and possibly cause game companies to publish bland, unoffensive crap, something that *Thrill Kill* could have caused. We'll have to see if the purported *Thrill Kill* effect occurs after *Manhunt* is released.



EARTH, WATER, FIRE, AIR, AND CRAP (WORST GAME)

Not only is *The Fifth Element* one of the lowest-rated games ever, it's also the very first game to receive a half-disc rating (old-school stars). Combine poor controls, horrendous graphics, and a terrible camera, and you have something that wasn't worth any money back then, but it's probably so cheap now it's worth getting just to check out just how awful it is.



PSP GRANDDADDY

The biggest announcement at Tokyo Game Show '98? What could be considered a precursor to the PSP, Sony announced the PocketStation, a wee little thing that basically served as the template for the Sega Dreamcast's VMU (Visual Memory Unit). The PocketStation sported six buttons, a 32x32 black-and-white screen, a 15-block memory card, and infrared signals for multiplayer fun back then, Sony was thinking of ways to obtain wireless connectivity. Just as Sony is positioning PSP as more than just a gaming device, the PocketStation featured non-gaming components such as an alarm clock and calendar to serve as a useful tool for students and workers. Games announced back then were versions of *Crash Bandicoot: WARPED*, *Street Fighter VIII*, *Zero 3*, and even *Final Fantasy VIII*.

OTHER GREAT GAMES THAT CAPPED OFF 1998

Go hunt for a copy of *Brave Fencer Musashi*. It got four out of five discs back then, and it's a great little action-based distraction from Square. Boasting "platform-style jumping sequences and all sorts of different minigames" in addition to "puzzles and traps" that are "well-integrated within the game's story," its only flaws are a too-linear quest and controls that could use a slight tweak. Otherwise, it's a good find on eBay.

Another good find is *Oddworld: Abe's Exodus*. After adding a much-needed "quiksave," Abe's puzzle-filled journey becomes significantly more playable. Sure, some of the action-platform elements might be jarring for those expecting hardcore puzzles, but the game's admitted oddity, and the puzzle design, merits sifting through the bargain bins and eBay listings.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Final Fantasy Anthology	Square EA	★★★★★	26
Final Fantasy Chronicles	Square EA	★★★★	47
Final Fantasy Origins	Square Enix	★★★★	67

Want to build up your hit points real quick in *Final Fantasy VII*? Wander around outside a town; get into random battles with easy enemies, then attack your own characters. The more HP you lose the greater chance you'll be given an HP boost in return.

DO AND UNDO Another common *FF7* trick is to perform an action, then cancel it during a battle. That makes inventing weapon skills and magic spells incredibly easy. For example, if you want to raise your weapon level, select Fight, select a target, then cancel immediately afterwards. Do this over and over again. Magic is done in a similar manner. Select Magic, then the spell, then the target, then cancel it right after. The number of times you'll have to do this depends on the monsters being fought, but it could be anywhere from 50 to 100 times per level. Note that once you obtain 100 skill points for your current spell weapon, even if you can no longer gain any more in that battle. Also, changing the cursor settings to "Memory" might make it easier to even up magic this way.

1 Final Fantasy Tactics

Sony CEA ★★★★

UNLOCK CLOUD STRIFE Want until you're almost at the end of chapter four for at least until you beat Zanbar. Demon Adramelik in Igros Castle. Give the Stone Cloud to Gougo and it will join you in reality but run off. Then make your way back to Zengarde's Trade City. You'll soon receive Cloud from some thieves, and you should then go to Aerena Volcano to retrieve his Alarra Blade.

2 Final Fantasy VII

Sony CEA ★★★★★

3 Final Fantasy VIII

Square EA ★★★★★

4 Final Fantasy IX

Square EA ★★★★★

5 Final Fantasy X

Konami ★★★★

6 Final Fantasy XI

Konami ★★★★

7 Final Fantasy XII

Konami ★★★★

8 Final Fantasy XIII

Konami ★★★★

9 Final Fantasy XIV

Konami ★★★★

10 Final Fantasy XV

Square Enix ★★★★★

11 Final Fantasy XVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

12 Final Fantasy XVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

13 Final Fantasy XVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

14 Final Fantasy XIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

15 Final Fantasy XX

Square Enix ★★★★★

16 Final Fantasy XXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

17 Final Fantasy XXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

18 Final Fantasy XXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

19 Final Fantasy XXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

20 Final Fantasy XXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

21 Final Fantasy XXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

22 Final Fantasy XXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

23 Final Fantasy XXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

24 Final Fantasy XXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

25 Final Fantasy XXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

26 Final Fantasy XXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

27 Final Fantasy XXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

28 Final Fantasy XXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

29 Final Fantasy XXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

30 Final Fantasy XXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

31 Final Fantasy XXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

32 Final Fantasy XXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

33 Final Fantasy XXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

34 Final Fantasy XXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

35 Final Fantasy XXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

36 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

37 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

38 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

39 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

40 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

41 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

42 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

43 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

44 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

45 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

46 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

47 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

48 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

49 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

50 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

51 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

52 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

53 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

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55 Final Fantasy XXXXX

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56 Final Fantasy XXXXI

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57 Final Fantasy XXXXII

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59 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

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60 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

61 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

62 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

63 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

64 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

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65 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

66 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

67 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

68 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

69 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

70 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

71 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

72 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

73 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

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74 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

75 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

76 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

77 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

78 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

79 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

80 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

81 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

82 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

83 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

84 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

85 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

86 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

87 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

88 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

89 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

90 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

91 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

92 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

93 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

94 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

95 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

96 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

97 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

98 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

99 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

100 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

101 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

102 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

103 Final Fantasy XXXXVIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

104 Final Fantasy XXXXIX

Square Enix ★★★★★

105 Final Fantasy XXXXX

Square Enix ★★★★★

106 Final Fantasy XXXXI

Square Enix ★★★★★

107 Final Fantasy XXXXII

Square Enix ★★★★★

108 Final Fantasy XXXXIII

Square Enix ★★★★★

109 Final Fantasy XXXXIV

Square Enix ★★★★★

110 Final Fantasy XXXXV

Square Enix ★★★★★

111 Final Fantasy XXXXVI

Square Enix ★★★★★

112 Final Fantasy XXXXVII

Square Enix ★★★★★

113 Final Fantasy XXX



REPLAY

You tell us about
the games now.

GRANDMASTER

Gary Gygax first published
Dungeons & Dragons in 1974

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
NCAA Football 98	EA Sports	★★★★	2
NCAA Football 99	EA Sports	★★★★★	12
NCAA Football 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	25
NCAA Football 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	36
NCAA GameBreaker '98	Sony CEA	★★★★	4
NCAA GameBreaker '99	989 Studios	★★★★	15
NCAA GameBreaker 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	25
NCAA GameBreaker 2001	Sony CEA	★★★★	37
NCAA March Madness '98	EA Sports	★★★★	7
NCAA March Madness '99	EA Sports	★★★★	18
NCAA March Madness 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	29
NCAA March Madness 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	41
Nectars Military Madness	Jaleco	★★★★	24
Need for Speed III	Electronic Arts	★★★★	8
Need for Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	★★★★	26
Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Electronic Arts	★★★★	33
Need for Speed: V-Rally	Electronic Arts	★★★	3
Need for Speed: V-Rally 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	28
Newman/Haas Racing	PlayStation	★★★★	7
The Next Testis	Hasbro	★★★★	24
NFL Blitz	Midway	★★★★★	13
NFL Blitz 2000	Midway	★★★★★	24
NFL Blitz 2001	Midway	★★★★	38
NFL GameDay '98	Sony CEA	★★★★★	1
NFL GameDay 99	989 Studios	★★★★	13
NFL GameDay 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	25
NFL GameDay 2001	989 Studios	★★★★	37
NFL GameDay 2002	Sony CEA	★★★★	49
NFL GameDay 2003	Sony CEA	★★★★	62
NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA	★★★★	74
NFL Xtreme	989 Studios	★★★★	11
NFL Xtreme 2	989 Studios	★★★	2
NHL '98	EA Sports	★★★★	2
NHL '99	EA Sports	★★★★	15
NHL 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	26
NHL 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	38
NHL Blades of Steel 2000	Konami	★★★	28
NHL Breakaway '98	Acclaim	★★★	2
NHL Championship 2000	Fox Interactive	★★★★	27
NHL FaceOff '98	Sony CEA	★★★★	1
NHL FaceOff 99	989 Studios	★★★★	16
NHL FaceOff 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	26
NHL FaceOff 2001	Sony CEA	★★★★	35
NHL Rock the Rink	Electronic Arts	★★★★	32
Nick Toons Racing	Infogrames	★★★	48
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★★	3
Nightmare Creatures II	Konami	★★	33
Ninja Shadow of Darkness	Eidos	★★	15
Nuclear Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★★	3
O.D.T.	PlayStation	★★★	15
Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus	GT Interactive	★★★★★	15
Oddworld: Maw of Ulkyon	GT Interactive	★★★★	1
Omega Boost	Sony CEA	★★★★	25
One	ASC	★★★★	4
One Piece Mansion	Capcom	★★	11
Pac-Man World	Namco	★★★★	25
Pandemonium! 2	Midway	★★★★	3
Panzer Front	Atetec	★★★★	51
Patapon the Rapper	Sony CEA	★★★★	2
Parasite Eve	Square EA	★★★★	12
Parasite Eve II	Square EA	★★★★	37
Patriotic Pinball	Gotham Games	★★★	70
Persona 2: Eternal Punishment	Atlus	★★★★	41
Peter Jacobsen's Golden Tee Golf	Infogrames	★★★★	41
PGA Tour '98	EA Sports	★★★	3
Phix: The Adventure	Atetec	★★★	74
Pinball	Konami	★★	68
Pipe Dreams 3D	Empire Int'l	★★	52
Pitfall 3D	Activision	★★	9
Planet of the Apes	Ubi Soft	★★	63
Play With The Tributaries	Knowledge Adv.	★★	20
Pocket Fighter	Capcom	★★★★	11
Point Blank	Namco	★★★	6
Point Blank 2	Namco	★★★★	20

REPLAY FORUM

BGDA LEVELING
Hey DPM, I bought "Balder's Gate: Dark Alliance so I can level up my characters in preparation for BG: DA2. Anyhow, do you know of any cool cheats to make me a supercool guy who can beat up Drizz Do Urden?"
*Dave Grayvis
Sacramento, CA*

Well, you want to make an ultimate character, so here's the ultimate cheat: Hold down L1+R3+(on your D-pad) +. While doing that, press R3 (down on the right analog). Boom, your character advances to level 20 and you'll get all level-one stats, plus 75,000 in gold.

JAK AND SECRETS
Based on your review, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to buy Jak II, so I went with the save set of getting Jak and Daxter first. It's once already, and I heard that there is a secret ending to the game. How do I get it? Do I have to do something really crazy, like finish the game in three hours or something? Is the secret ending worth whatever I have to do?

**Jay Hawkins
Reno, NV**
Of course it's worth it! Secret endings are worth the trouble, no matter what. While it's true that some normal game endings stink, the secret ending is always fun enough to be worth it. You just need to collect at least 100 power cells to see it. Good luck!

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Point Blank 3	Namco	★★★★★	44
Polaris SnoCross	Virtua	★★★	38
Pong	Hasbro	★★★★	27
Pool Hustler	Activision	★★★★	15
Populous: The Beginning	Electronic Arts	★★★	21
Porsche Challenge	Sony CEA	★★★★	1
Power Play Sports Trivia	Ubi Soft	★★	58
Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue	THQ	★★★	40
Power Shovel	Acclaim	★★★	49
Power Soccer 2	PlayStation	★★★★	5
Power Spike Pro Beach Volleyball	Infogrames	★★★★	41
The Powerpuff Girls: Chemical X-fection	Bam	★★	1
Pooy Pop	Konami	★★★★	3
Pro 18 World Tour Golf	PlayStation	★★★★	19
Pro Pinball: Big Race USA	Empire	★★★★	37
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	Empire	★★★★	37
Pro Pinball: Timestop!	Take 2	★★	10
Psybadek	PlayStation	★★★★	5
Punkin Skunk	Jaleco	★★★★	6
Putter Golf	Agtec	★★	53
Puzzle Star Sweep	Atetec	★★★★	43
Puzznic	Mud Duck	★★	71
Q-Bert	Hasbro	★★★★	23
Quake II	Activision	★★★★	27
R-Type Delta	Agtec	★★★★	23
R-Types	Asci	★★★★	17
R4: Ridge Racer Type 4	Namco	★★★★	20
Racing	Agtec	★★	43
Rage Ball	Atetec	★★	68
Railroad Tycoon II	Take 2	★★★	30
Rainbow Six	Red Storm	★★	27
Rally Cross 2	989 Studios	★★★★	15
Rampage	Midway	★★	4
Rampage 2: Universal Tour	Midway	★★	21
Rampage Through Time	Midway	★★	36
Ray Tracer	THQ	★★★	5
RayCrisis	Working Designs	★★★	38
Rayman 2: The Great Escape	Ubi Soft	★★★★	35
Rayman: Brain Games	Ubi Soft	★★★★	50
Rayman Rush	Ubi Soft	★★★★	57
Razor Freestyle Scooter	Crave	★★★	41
RC de GO!	Acclaim	★★★★	50
RC Helicopter	Agtec	★★	68
RC Revenge	Acclaim	★★★★	37
RC Stunt Copter	Titus	★★★★	25
Re-Hot	Acclaim	★★	26
Robby 2: Evolution	Midway	★★★	23
Ready 2 Rumble: Round 2	Midway	★★★	40
Red Asphalt	Interplay	★★	9
Red Fishing	Natsume	★★	34
Red Fishing II	Natsume	★★	34
Resident Evil: Director's Cut	Capcom	★★★	2
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	★★★★	6
Resident Evil 2: Dual Shock	Capcom	★★★★	13
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	Capcom	★★★★★	27
Resident Evil: Survivor	Capcom	★★	38
Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure	Athos	★★★★	35
Rising Zan	Atetec	★★★★	24
Risk	Hasbro	★★★★	11
Rival Schools	Capcom	★★★★	14
Riveting: The Sequel in Mystery	Atetec	★★★★	6
Road Rash 3D	Electronic Arts	★★★	11
Road Rash: Jail Break	Electronic Arts	★★	30
Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots	Marcel	★★★	41
Rocket Power: Team Rocket Rescue	THQ	★★	51
Rogue 1rp	GT Interactive	★★★★	14
Roll-Age	PlayStation	★★★★	13
Rollage	PlayStation	★★★★	19
Rollage Stage II	PlayStation	★★★★	31
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VI	Koei	★★	30
Roswell Conspiracies: Aliens, Myths, & Legends	Red Storm	★★	48
RPG Maker	Agtec	★★★★	35
Rugrats: Totally Angelica	THQ	★★★★	48
Rugrats in Paris: The Movie	THQ	★★★★	41
Runesabout 2	Hot-B	★★	36
Running Wild	989 Studios	★★	14
Rushdown	Electronic Arts	★★	19
Sabrina, Teenage Witch: A Twitch in Time!	Knowstone Addict	★★	45
Saga Frontier	Sony CEA	★★★★	8
Saga Frontier 2	Square EA	★★★★	29
Sakura Journey West	Koei	★★★★	47
Saltwater Sportfishing	AgeTech	★★★★	52
Sammy Sosa High Heat Baseball 2001	3DO	★★	32
Sammy Sosa Softball Slam	3DO	★★	33
Samurai Showdown: Warrior's Rage	SNK	★★	36
Scooby-Doo and the Cyber Chase	THQ	★★	52
Scrabble	Hasbro	★★	28
Sentinel Returns	PlayStation	★★	11
Sesame Street Sports	New Kids!	★★★★	54
Shadow Madness	Acclaim	★★	27
Shadow Master	PlayStation	★★★★	5
Shadow Tower	AgeTech	★★	28
Shrek: Treasure Hunt	TDK Mediaactive	n/a	n/a
Shipwreckers	PlayStation	★★★★	3
Shooter: Space Shot	AgeTech	★★★★	48
Shooter: Starfighter Samvein	Acclaim	★★	43
Silent Hill	Konami	★★★★	13
Silhouette Mirage	Working Designs	★★★★	29
Smash Thunk	Electronic Arts	★★	33
The Simpsons: Wrestling	Taito	★★	45
Skateboarding	Electronic Arts	★★★★	6
Skydiving Extreme	Banpresto	★★	49
Slowdown	Electronic Arts	★★★★	24
Slots	Activision	★★	72
Small Soldiers	Electronic Arts	★★	15
Smurfs	Infogrames	★★	29
Smart Racer	Crave	★★	37
Snow-Cross Championship Racing	Atetec	★★	43
Snowboarding	Atetec	★★	43
Sol Divide	Atetec	★★	68
Sorcerers' Maze	Atetec	★★	68
Soul of the Samurai	Konami	★★	24
South Park: Chef's Luv Shack	Acclaim	★★	28
South Park: Rally	Acclaim	★★	29
Space Invaders	Activision	★★	27
Spawning: The Eternal	Sony CEA	★★	4
Spec Ops: Covert Assault	Take 2	★★	52
Spec Ops: Ranger Elite	Take 2	★★	46
Spec Ops: Stealth Patrol	Take 2	★★	34
Speed Punks	Sony CEA	★★★★	32
Speeder Racer	Jaleco	★★	8
SpeedBall 2100	Empire	★★	40
Spider-Man: Maximum	Activision	★★★★	32
Spider-Man 2: Enter Electro	Activision	★★★★	50
Spin Jam	Take 2	★★	38
SpineBob SquarePants	THQ	★★	51
Sports Car GT	Electronic Arts	★★★★	21
Spyro the Dragon	Sony CEA	★★★★	13
Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage!	Sony CEA	★★★★	22
Spyro 3: Year of the Dragon	Sony CEA	★★★★	31
Star Ocean: The 2nd Story	Sony CEA	★★★★	22
Star Trek: Invasion	Activision	★★★★	37
Star Wars Episode I: Jedi Power Battles	LucasArts	★★★★	33
Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace	LucasArts	★★★★	23
Star Wars Masters of Taris Kasi	LucasArts	★★★★	4
Star Wars Demolition	LucasArts	★★★★	41
Steel Regn	Sony CEA	★★★★	2
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	★★★★	15
Street Fighter Collection	Capcom	★★★	4
Street Fighter Collector 2	Capcom	★★★	16
Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha	Capcom	★★★★	2
Street Fighter EX2 Plus	Capcom	★★★★	33



Entertainment Weekly
The Best
Video Games

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE	GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Street Racquetball	Agetec	9	68	Tripie Play 2001	EA Sports	★★★★★	32
Street Seiber	Electronic Arts	★★★	19	Tripie Play Baseball	EA Sports	★★★★	44
Street Skier 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	32	Turbo Prop Racing	Sony CEA	★★★★	11
Strider 2	Capcom	★★★★	34	Turnabout	Natsume	★★★★	69
Striker Pro 2000	Infogrames	★★★★★	33	Twisted Metal III	989 Studios	★★★★	26
Strikers 1945	Agetec	★★★★	44	Twisted Metal 4	989 Studios	★★★★	28
Stuart Little 2	Sony CEA	★★★★	60	Tyco RC Assault With A Battery	Sony CEA	★★★★	52
Sukoden II	Konami	★★★★	26	Tyco RC	Mattel	★★	38
Super Bubble Pop	Jaleco	★★	68	Ultimate 8-Ball	THQ	★★★★	22
Super Shot Soccer	Tecmo	★★★★	61	Ultimate Fighting Championship	Crave	★★★★	40
Superbike 2000	EA Sports	★★	32	Umjammer Lammy	Sony CEA	★★★★	24
SuperCross 2000	EA Sports	★★★	29	Uprising X	Eidos	★★	17
SuperCross Circuit	989 Studios	★★★★	28	Urban Chaos	Eidos	★★	33
Superstar Dance Club "1 Hit's!"	X5 Games	★★★	67	Vagrant Story	Square EA	★★★★	33
Surf Riders	Ubisoft	★★	35	Valkyrie Profile	Enix	★★★★	36
Sydney 2000	Eidos	★★★	38	Vampire Hunter D	Jaleco	★★	37
Syphon Filter	989 Studios	★★★★★	11	Vanark	Jaleco	★★	32
Syphon Filter 2	989 Studios	★★★★	31	Vandal Heirs II	Konami	★★	27
Syphon Filter 3	Sony CEA	★★★★	52	Vanguard Bandits	Working Designs	★★★★	33
Tai Fu	Activision	★★	19	Vanishing Point	Acclaim	★★★★	44
TRA G	Sunsoft	★★★★	20	Vegas Games 2000	3DO Interactive	★★★★	27
Tactics Ogre	Atmos	★★★★★	12	V.I.P.	Ubisoft	★★	51
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Tales of Destiny	Namco	★★★★	13	Vigilante 8 Second Offense	Activision	★★	29
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Team LOSI RC Racing	Fox Interactive	★★★	13	Vs	THQ	★★	3
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Thrasher: Skate & Destroy	Rockstar	★★★★	29	WWC/WNU Thunder	THQ	★★	17
Threads of Fate	Square EA	★★★★	35	The Weakest Link	Activision	★★★★	51
Thunder Force V	Working Designs	★★★	13	Wheel of Fortune	Hasbro	★★★★	15
Tiger Woods 99 PGA Tour Golf	EA Sports	★★★★	16	Wheel of Fortune 2	Hasbro	★★★★	39
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	41	Winnie the Pooh: Kindergarten	Barn	n/a	n/a
Tigger's Honey Hunt	NewWorld	★★★★	41	Winnie the Pooh: Preschool	Barn	n/a	n/a
Time Crisis: Project Titan	Namco	★★★★	45	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? 2nd Edition	Sony CEA	★★★★	35
Tiny Tank	Sony CEA	★★	25	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? 3rd Edition	Sony CEA	★★	47
Tiny Toon Adventures: Plucky's Big Adventure	Conspiracy	★★	50	Wild 9	Interplay	★★★★	15
Tiny Toons: The Great Beanstalk	NewWorld	★★★★	18	Wild Arms 2	Sony CEA	★★★★	33
TOCA 2	Activision	★★★★★	27	The Wild Thornberrys: Animal Adventure	Mattel	★★	41
Tom & Jerry in House Trap	Eidos	★★★	41	WipeOut 3	Psygnosis	★★★★	26
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	Red Storm	★★★	45	Woody Woodpecker Racing	Konami	★★	40
Tomb Raider II	Eidos	★★★★	4	World Cup 98	EA Sports	★★	10
Tomb Raider III	Eidos	★★★★	16	World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks	3DO	★★	39
Tomb Raider Chronicles	Eidos	★★★	41	World Is Not Enough	Electronic Arts	★★	40
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation	Eidos	★★★★	29	World's Scariest Police Chases	Activision	★★	47
Tombola!	Sony CEA	★★★★	11	Worms Armageddon	Hasbro	★★★★	27
Tombola! 2: The Evil Swine Return	Sony CEA	★★★★	29	Worms Party World	Ubisoft	★★★★	55
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Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Activision	★★★★	26	WWF SmackDown!	THQ	★★★★	25
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Toy Story 2	Activision	★★★	28	X-Men: Children of the Atom	Activision	★★	6
Toy Story Racer	Activision	★★★	44	X-Men: Mutant Academy	Activision	★★	36
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Top Gunne	Atmos	★★★	13	Xenogears	Square EA	★★★★	14
Treasures of the Deep	Namco	★★★★	1	You Don't Know Jack!	Berkeley Systems	★★★★	25
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Triple Play '99	EA Sports	★★★	9	Yu-Gi-Oh! Forbidden Memories	Konami	★★	57
Triple Play 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	20				

READER REVIEWS

Virtual Soul Fighting

We want your reviews of the best and worst games, so write a review and send it to opm@idavids.com. We can't publish everyone, so keep it short, be witty, and remember that not every game deserves a 5-star rating just because you like it!

VF4 VS. SCII

What you said: "As a fighting-game fan and enthusiast (and not just of the 3D kind), Christmas came early when sequels to two of the finest brawlers of all time were released in quick succession this summer. While the new *Soul Calibur* bears a 'II' indicating a true sequel, in all honesty, it is much like *VF* Evo in that it is more of an update of a previous game. But what an update it is, Namco would have had to mess up pretty bad to screw up the follow-up to what is quite possibly the single greatest fighter of all time. And while *Soul Calibur II* necessarily doesn't reinvent the genre, or the genre for that matter, it does everything to near perfection."

Every SC fan will more than likely find their favorite character in this edition in some form, with an updated move list building on the fighter's previous style. Beginners will be able to pick up this game and hack away, while masters will fine tune their skills against both human and A.I. opponents (especially in the new Weapons Master mode). There are two problems I have with SC though, the first being that the PS2 got a crappier exclusive character than the other versions (if they could license Link for Nintendo, why couldn't we get Dante from *DMC*?). The second being, in all honesty, SCII (more than other fighting games) is best played against another human player of your relative skill level, for people who just play against the computer, it might get dull.

I personally think that no fighting-game fan can go wrong with either game, but I personally prefer VF4. It's deeper, more strategic, and boasts two new characters and a new Quest mode replacing Kumite, not to mention what is probably the best fighting-game engine of all time (plus its only \$20!). I personally see myself playing a lot more VF4 than SCII when I'm by myself, as a dedicated player will have tons to do with the training mode, Quest mode, Japanese A.I., and experimentation with different characters. It's a tough call to make, as each game is so good in its own right. Both games also make fine use of the Dual Shock 2. Only purists and fighting-game fanatics will need to buy an arcade stick (may I suggest one from X-Arcade?). It's a tough decision to make, largely one of personal preference; try out each one and decide for yourself for get both! Whatever your choice, you will not be disappointed."

Your Scores:

VF4: *****

SCII: *****

Vincent Cimino
vinnman45@aol.com

What we said: "VF4: 'All of the things that made us go gaga over the original VF still stand.'

SCII: 'Soul Calibur II is brilliant. It's one of those extremely rare games that screams perfection.'

Our Scores:

VF4: *****

SCII: *****

"No fighting-game fan can go wrong with either game."



Virtua Fighter 4 vs. Soul Calibur II

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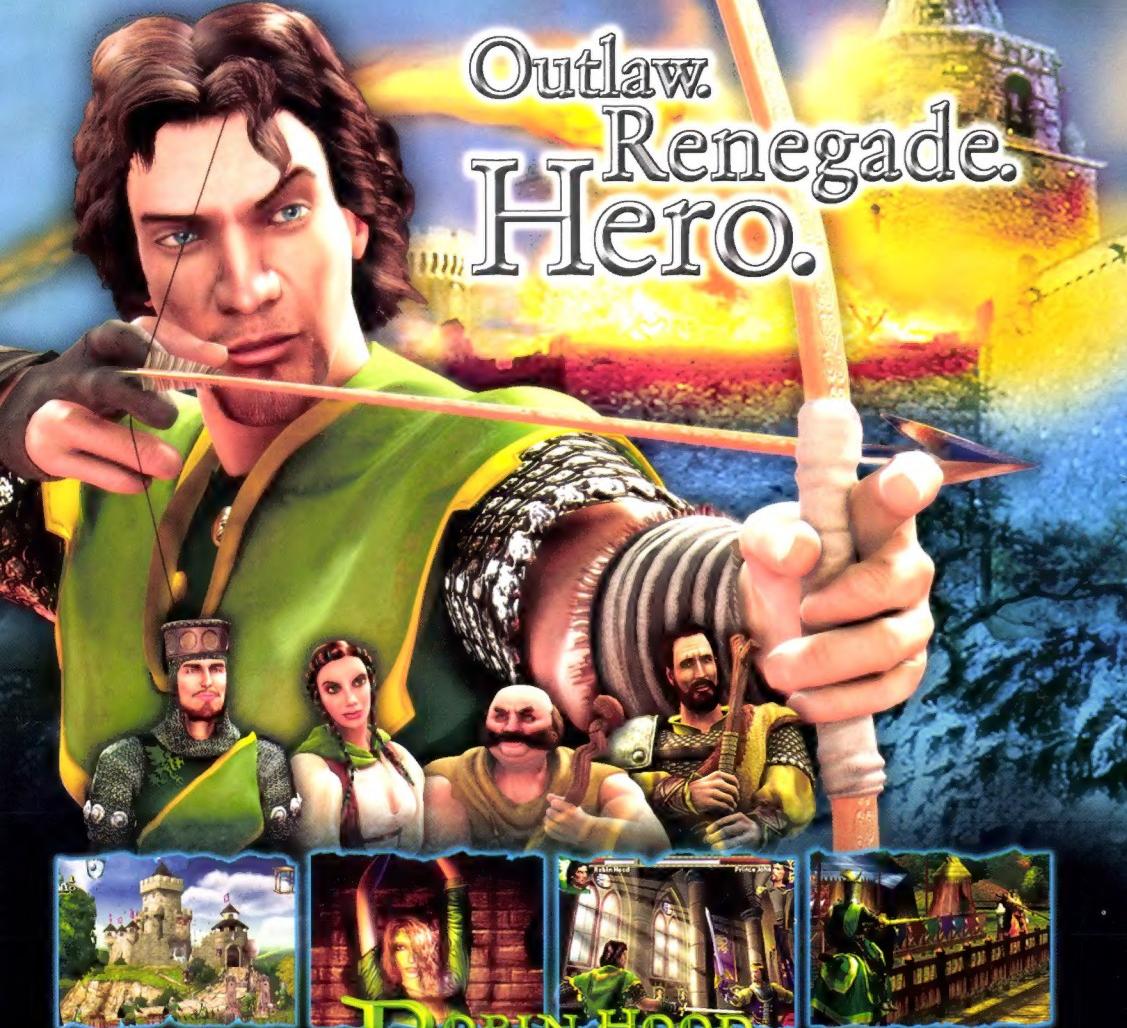
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